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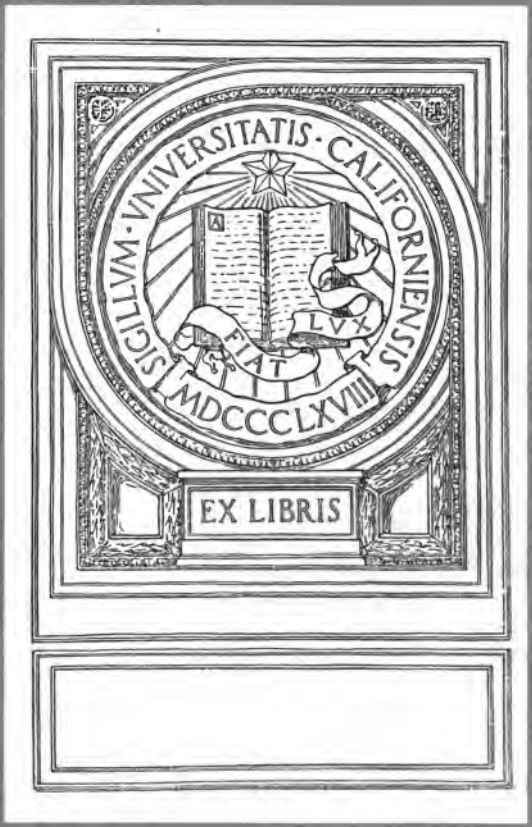
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THE WOMAN

(MALOMBRA)

THE WOMAN

(MALOMBRA)

BY

ANTONIO FOGAZZARO

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Translated from the Italian

BY

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GENERAL

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PART I

CECILIA

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THE WOMAN

(MALOMBRA)

CHAPTER I

IN A STRANGE COUNTRY

One after another the doors are banged to; perhaps, thinks an eccentric traveller, by that iron fate which now without appeal will whirl away himself and his fellow-passengers into the darkness. The engine whistles, a succession of violent shocks passes from carriage to carriage; the train moves out slowly beneath the ample roof, passes from the light of the signal-boxes into the darkness of the night, from the confused noises of the great city into the silence of the sleeping fields; winds, puffing, like some huge serpent, among the labyrinth of tracks, until, having found the right one, it dashes along it, palpitating from end to end, a mass of living, tumultuous pulsations.

It is hardly possible to guess what were the thoughts of our quixotic traveller as he was whirled along amid puffs of smoke, clouds of sparks, and the dim forms of trees and squalid huts. Perhaps he was seeking the hidden meaning of the strange illegible monogram on a portmanteau lying on the opposite seat, for he kept his gaze fixed upon it, now and then with a twitching of the lips as of one who attempts a calculation,

and then with eyebrows raised, as one does when the result is an absurdity. The train had passed a few stations when a name shouted out repeatedly in the darkness roused him from his reverie. A puff of fresh air had scattered the fine threads of his meditation and the train had stopped. He got out hurriedly; he was the only passenger for ——.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' said a rough, strident voice, 'but is your honour expected by the gentlemen at the castle?'

The question was put by a man who stood facing him, touching his cap with his left hand and holding a whip in the right.

'I am afraid I don't understand.'

'Oh! Great heavens,' said the man scratching his head, 'who can it be then?'

'Well, tell me the name of the gentlemen at the castle.'

'Ah! well, you see down our way we call them the *gentlemen at the castle*, and that's the only name we know them by. For ten miles round everyone knows who is meant; you come from Milan and that's another story. Bear with me, I am jesting, and I know the name, but for the life of me at the present moment I can't remember. We poor folk haven't very good memories at the best of times, and besides, such a curious, uncommon name!'

'Well, what is the name?'

'Don't hurry me, don't talk, don't confuse me. Hi! there, a light!'

A porter came slowly down the platform, his arms hanging straight at his side, with a lantern dangling so as almost to touch the ground.

'Don't burn your trousers. Nobody will pay for a new pair,' quoth the youth with the short memory. 'Hold up that clumsy lantern of yours. Here, let me have it

a moment.' And grabbing at the lantern he almost hit the traveller in the face as he held it up.

'You're the man, sir, you're the man; just the very description they gave me. A young gentleman with black eyes, black hair, and a dark complexion. Hurrah!'

'But who told you all this?'

'Why, his lordship to be sure.'

'A queer business this,' thought the new arrival to himself. 'A man whom I've never seen and who says in his letter that he's never seen me.'

'Wait a minute,' exclaimed the other as he fumbled in his pocket. 'Even my old woman couldn't have been more stupid, even if she tried. Didn't his lordship give me something to make you know me by? I've got it somewhere. Ah, here it is.'

It was a card smelling of tobacco and dirty paper-money, and bore the name :—

'CESARE D'ORMENGO.'

'Let us be off,' said the new-comer.

Outside the station stood an open chaise. The horse tied to a fence, his head drooping, was resignedly awaiting his fate. 'Get in, your honour, the seat is a bit hard, but you see we are in the country. Whoa!' And catching up the reins the nimble charioteer sprang on to the box, and, cracking his whip, sent the horse flying down the dark lane as coolly as though it had been mid-day.

'No cause to be afraid,' he remarked, 'even though it were as dark as a wolf's gullet. The mare and I know this road by heart, every inch of it. Whoa! Only last night I drove two gentlemen, from Milan like yourself. Oh, he is a grand old gentleman is the Count,' he added pleasantly, edging away from his companion and sitting

on the handle of the whip. 'What a good man; and what a gentleman! Why, he has friends in every quarter of the globe. To-day comes one, to-morrow another, and all of them fine gentlemen, men of science and all the rest of it. But your honour will know all about this already.'

'I? Why, it's the first time I've been here.'

'Yes, so I see. But you know his lordship?'

'No.'

'Well, I never!' exclaimed the driver with profound astonishment. 'A fine character, sir. I'm a friend of his,' he added, without stopping to explain whether as a fine gentleman or as a man of science. 'I have served him so long. Why! only to-day he stood me a glass. I don't know whether it was French wine or English wine, but, oh! it was wine! Ah!'

'Any family?'

'No. That is to say—'

At this point the right hand wheel gave a lurch as they passed over a big heap of gravel.'

'Hold your tongue and look where you're going to,' growled the traveller.

His driver at once belaboured the poor steed with blows and curses, and they dashed forward at a gallop.

As they crossed the bridge over a mountain torrent the night grew clearer. To the right, the white line of the sandy river bed lost itself in an immense stretch of open country; on the left and in front were low hills resting against a line of loftier ones; behind them, jagged mountain peaks standing out against the grey sky.

Nothing was heard but the horse's trot, and from time to time the scrunching of the gravel beneath the wheels and the persistent bark of dogs fretting at their chains.

Horse, driver and traveller went on silently together as though impelled by the same motive towards the same goal, thus offering a picture of the fragile nature of human compacts and the artificiality of our alliances. For the first was in secret making for his warm and comfortable stable, the second for a certain wine from a certain red-cheeked landlady, a good wine sparkling with love and laughter; while the third, the most intelligent and the most civilised of the three, knew not the road nor the goal to which it led.

They drove clattering through dark deserted hamlets, whose gloomy cottages seemed to stand on guard over the slumbers of their humble inmates; they passed by gardens and pretentious little villas, whose frippery had a tawdry aspect in the solemn shades of night. After a long stretch of level country their road lay by sun-warmed hills all facing towards the east, and then dipped suddenly into a narrow, gloomy valley flanked by forest-clad mountains. At times the road hugged an outlying spur, at times twisted away as though shuddering at the rugged touch, at length took a bee-line up the steep ascent. The horse dropped into a walk, the driver jumped down, and, letting his whip trail behind him, said, in decisive tones, 'A long business.'

'To return to my question,' remarked the traveller as he lighted a cigar. 'Any family?'

'Not I, your honour. My wife is ugly, old, and ill-tempered as the fiend.'

'Not you, stupid; the Count.'

'Ah, his lordship! Who knows. One never knows anything about gentlemen's affairs. Sometimes one thinks they are married, one hears that there is a lady, that there are children; and then, when the master is on his death-bed, and you wish to invoke a blessing for the

poor lady, she vanishes; on the other hand, they sometimes live like friars, and yet when the crash comes there is the lady with her tears and her claws. A nice thing to be a gentleman! Now, if I get to know a pretty girl she throws me over within a fortnight; but my wife will stick to me as long as there is breath in her body. His lordship lived alone for some years, but now there is a young lady at the castle. Some say she is his daughter, some his niece. As a matter of fact, she is his housekeeper. The dull clods of peasants say that she is ugly. Your honour will see whether she is ugly. Ah! I ought to have been born a gentleman.'

As though to console himself, the strange fellow struck a furious blow at the mare, which went off at a gallop with his interlocutor, and so broke off the conversation. Reaching, after a long pull, the top of the hill, she stopped to take breath. From the summit the scenery changed. Steep mountains rose on the right and left, barely leaving space between them for the road. Other mountains, lightly tipped with mist, rose above the dark tops of the trees at their base, facing the hill down which the road lay.

The driver jumped up again on to his box and went down the hill at a trot towards the tall trees of an avenue which rapidly opened out before them. Between the trees a more extended view was seen; it became lighter, and stretches of vineyard could be discerned.

A light which appeared on the right side of the road came in front of the horse, which pulled up.

'Well?' asked a voice.

'Oh, he's come, he's come,' replied the driver, jumping down. 'We are there, your honour. Thank you, sir, I shall drink your health. You are a gentleman and no one dare say ought but good of you. I thank your

honour and I wish you good-night. Here, an ended gentleman's bag.

'Signor Silla?' said the man with the lantern, who looked like a servant.

'I am he.'

'At your service, sir.'

He led the way in silence, with the bag in his right hand and the lantern in his left, down the narrow path flanked by low rough walls, along which the light danced and glided, driving before it, dragging in its train, the darkest of the shadows.

In vain did Silla peep curiously over the top of the walls; all he could see was the shadowy forms of a few trees hanging over from the steep hillside, their scanty branches raised as in amazement and supplication. The clanging of a bell made him start; his guide had halted before an iron gate. It was soon opened, and the flints of the pathway and the outline of the gate were swallowed up in the darkness; the light of the lantern now fell on the finest gravel, and, on either side, upon dark-leaved plants with thick impenetrable foliage. After the gravel, grass and a badly-traced track passing among vines in full foliage and leading to the middle of a broad staircase of black, irregular slabs. The beginning and the end were both out of sight; but from the top and from the bottom of the steps was heard the gentle voice of falling water. The guide stepped cautiously over the shaky stones, which gave out a metallic sound beneath their feet. By the pale light of the lantern could be seen at regular intervals two enormous pedestals supporting two grey human forms, motionless on either side of the steps. At length the last step was reached, the light passed over a fine red gravel and played on the large leaves of *arums* planted along the edge, while, hard by, a spring murmured

poor lady the darkness. The guide turned to the left, turned the corner of a lofty edifice, went up two steps, and with a ceremonious bow opened a large glass door to the new arrival.

In the brightly-lighted vestibule stood a gentleman dressed from head to foot in black, who came forward to meet him, bowing profoundly and rubbing his hands together.

'Good evening. You are welcome. His lordship has retired, the hour being a little—how shall I say?—a little late. He has charged me to make his excuses. I have, in fact, the honour of being his lordship's secretary. Allow me to show you the way to your room. Allow me. You will perhaps wish to go there. After you, I beg.'

The ceremonious secretary showed the new-comer up a noble staircase and accompanied him as far as the first floor, where, having obtained his promise to come down to supper later on, he handed him over to the care of the servant and went downstairs, waiting for him in the dining-room, where supper was laid for two, and where the stranger very soon put in an appearance. Not, however, because he was hungry, but because the singular man who had invited him to the meal had aroused his curiosity.

The secretary looked about fifty. Two small light blue eyes sparkled in a wrinkled, sallow face, beneath two great shocks of hair that was no longer auburn, and was not yet grey. His hair and complexion, the mechanical rapidity of his movements, certain petrified consonants and certain deep-toned vowels that issued from his mouth, as though out of a cavern, at once stamped him as a German. The old-fashioned cut of the spotless black clothes, the stiff collar and cuffs and white shirt-front were, moreover, those of a German and a gentleman

But, for one curious circumstance, the gentleman ended at the wrists. The hands were large, brown, covered with scars, flabby and cracked on the back, horny in the palm. They bore the record of long hours of heat, of frost, of exhaustive toil. They had lost all pliability, and no longer gave expression to his thoughts as the hand of a man of culture is wont to do. In their stead, the ever-moving arms and shoulders spoke with brusque energy, with passion. More eloquent still was his face.

It was an ugly, merry face, comical and full of fun, sparkling with fire; a labyrinth of fine wrinkles which contracted and expanded about two bright little eyes, now wide open and serious, now contracted by mirth or anger or pain into two bright flashing points. Sudden flushes of blood would rush upwards from the neck, spreading over his face and forehead, but leaving the sallow line around the purple shining nose. In short, the whole soul of the secretary was written there on his face; emotion, sorrow, rejoicing passed across it in agitated succession like a light driven hither and there by the wind behind a transparent screen. His voice had the tone of sincerity, and was of varied compass; it was more vehement than that of a southerner, and often raised a smile by its accent, by the jumps from deep notes to high ones, but it was an impressive voice. And he talked much that evening at supper, eating hardly anything, emptying his glass often. He began with a series of ceremonious courtesies, somewhat stiff, somewhat exaggerated, little friendly approaches that found no echo in the cold reserve of the guest; then the conversation turned on general topics, the secretary talking of Italy with the air of a man who has seen many countries and many cities, who possesses a wide knowledge of men and of affairs, and introduces into every discussion, with the

coolest self-confidence, unexpected views, new opinions, that perhaps will not bear calm criticism though they carry away the vulgar. Yet he did not display the cynicism of one who has travelled much, nor manifest a tendency towards the *nihil admirari*. So far from this, the sonorous cavities of his chest were full of sounds of admiration which exploded every minute. His companion must have strangely taken his fancy to induce him to talk so much to one who maintained a reserve that partook of hauteur. The secretary looked at him with eyes that assumed a softer and more affectionate expression every moment. He insisted on his taking this and that; finally he ventured on a few familiarities, on a few questions that might cause his young friend to issue from his shell.

'And what do they say at Milan?' he exclaimed all of a sudden, throwing himself back in his chair and resting his knife and fork upright in both hands on the edge of the table. 'What do they say at Milan about Otto the Great?'

Noticing the guest's surprise at the unexpected question, he burst into a comical laugh. 'I am speaking of Bismarck,' he added, giving a full sound to the word Bismarck, and quivering with pleasure from head to foot, as though, in the torture of speaking Italian, those two syllables brought him relief, and a breath of his native air.

The Prince, on that summer evening of 1864, was yet far from success and fame; but his compatriot spoke of him, without expecting any response, for ten minutes and more, impetuously, with admiration mingled with hate and fear.

'In Europe they think he is mad,' he concluded, 'but, great heavens! *Wir haben sechs und dreiszig Herren*, my dear sir. Another piece of this trout? We have six-

and-thirty lords; in ten years we shall see. Have you ever tasted Johannisberg? I feel ashamed that the finest wine in the world is made in Germany, but not within the territories of my king. I am not a man to put up long with such things.

'Oh!' went on the loquacious secretary, running his fingers through his hair and smacking his lips. 'Oh! the Johannisberger, oh!' and he laughingly screwed up his bright eyes as though he were drinking in the longed-for nectar. 'One knows when a bottle of Johannisberg has been uncorked in a room. Another glass of wine, my dear sir; allow me. It is only Sassella and has no more bouquet than water, but for Italian wine it is passable. You must excuse my frank speech, but in Italy they do not understand either making or drinking wine.'

'Not even drinking?'

'No, not even drinking.

'Wenig nur verdirbt den Magen
Und zu viel erhitzt das Haupt.

'You understand German? No? Well, it is Goethe who says, "A little injures the stomach, and too much inflames the head." The Italians either get tipsy or else drink water. I exaggerate, my dear sir, I exaggerate. To drink a bottle a day is like drinking water. The most sensible people drink it for their stomachs' sakes; you follow me? Nobody drinks for the sake of the heart, *ad exhilarandum cor!* You laugh? All we Germans are, to some extent, Latinists, even the beggars, even those hounds of princes! Now, everyone ought to drink till they feel happy, but never till they feel mad. Wine is perpetual youth. As long as

I live I wish to be twenty, for three or four hours a day, but I shall never be ten; that is the difference.'

As the limpid Sassella ran low in the bottle, the secretary's years shook their wings and flew away two by two from his venerable shoulders. The latter squared themselves boldly, rising from manhood in its decline to manhood in its prime, which, in turn, gave place to perfect youth. The limpid Sassella ran low; until at length the golden age arrived, the age of impulsive affection, of quick feeling, of blind and ready friendship. The secretary held out his hands, turned his red beard towards his temperate and taciturn companion, caught hold of one of his hands with both his own and pressed it warmly.

'In the name of all that's holy, my dear sir, have we not broken bread and tasted wine together, and yet we do not know each other's name? His lordship did indeed tell me yours, but I have forgotten it.'

'Corrado Silla,' replied the young man.

'Silla, ah, Silla. Quite so. I hope you will never place my name on your proscription lists. Andreas Gotthold Steinegge, of Nassau, expelled from his college for being too fond of wine, from his family for being too fond of women, from his country for being too fond of freedom. Ah! my dear Signor Silla, it was the last passion that was the mad one. Why, I should now be a Kammerrath at Nassau, like the late Steinegge, my father, or a colonel like that low hound, my brother. But liberty, *die Freiheit*—do you follow me?—is a pneumatic word.'

At this point the secretary seized his chair rapidly with both hands and pushed it back violently, and then folded his arms and looked hard at Silla, who was mystified.

'What do you mean? A pneumatic word?'

'Ah, quite so, you don't understand? It is, in fact, not altogether easy. Words are divided, my dear Signor Silla, into algebraical words, mechanical words, and pneumatic words. I will now explain the subject to you as it was taught to me by a friend of mine at Wiesbaden, who was shot by those cursed Prussians in 1848. The algebraical words descend from the brain, and are signs of the equation between the subject and the object; the mechanical words are formed by the tongue as necessary sounds in a language. But the pneumatic words are uttered by the lungs, sound like musical instruments, nobody knows what they mean, and all mankind is intoxicated by them. If, instead of "*Freiheit*," instead of "Liberty," one were to utter a word of ten syllables, how many fewer heroes, how many fewer madmen, there would be in the world! Listen, my dear young friend. I am old. I am alone. I have no money. I may die on the streets like a dog, but if this night they were to say to me,—"Steinegge, *alter Kerl*, will you enter the service of the reactionary government to-morrow, be a Kammerrath at Nassau, sit by your own hearth, see your daughter whom you haven't seen for twelve years," I, old madman, should reply, "No, by heaven! *Viva la libertà!*"'

He brought down his fist with a great thump on the table, panting, breathing noisily through his nose with his mouth closed.

'Bravo!' exclaimed Silla, moved despite himself. 'I would like to be an old madman like you.'

'Oh, no, no! don't wish that! Don't say these things over the supper-table! One has to learn what it costs to cry "*Viva la libertà!*" and how much it is worth. Oh! don't let us speak of it.'

They were both silent for a moment.

'You come from Nassau?' resumed Silla.

'Yes, but let us avoid that subject; it is a sad one. I don't want sad thoughts, for I am very gay just now, very happy, because you please me immensely; yes, yes, yes, yes!'

He nodded his head repeatedly, his chin touching his breast as though he had a spring in the back of his neck; his eyes sparkling with laughter.

'You will not be leaving us to-morrow?' he asked.

'I should wish to be getting back certainly.'

'Oh! but his lordship will not allow you to go.'

'Why?'

'Because I believe that he is kindly disposed towards you.'

'But he doesn't even know me.'

'Hum! ha!' and Steinegge whistled softly to himself, shutting his eyes and bending forward till his beard was in his plate, his arms stretched out beneath the table; his head looked like that of a gnome.

'Do you mean that he does know me?' inquired Silla.

'I mean that he has talked to me for an hour about you to-day.'

'And what did he say?'

'Ah!' exclaimed the secretary, sitting upright in his chair and raising his hands towards the ceiling. 'I have not yet reached that point, my dear sir; I have not yet come to that. There is room for much Sassella between your question and my reply.'

He caught hold of the two bottles, pretended to weigh them, shook them and put them down again. They were empty.

'There is no more friendship in them,' he said with a

sigh, 'nor sincerity, nor kindness. Perhaps we had better go to bed.'

The clock at the top of the first flight of stairs between the first floor and the second struck half-past one as Silla entered the room assigned to him, yet he had no desire for sleep. Upright and motionless he looked fixedly at the flame of the candle, as though that bright light could have cleared away the mists that dulled his brain. Suddenly he pulled himself together, took the candle and set out upon a voyage of discovery, which turned out less instructive perhaps, but more thrilling, than the famous one of Count Saverio. The room was large, lofty, square. A heavy carved wooden bedstead; opposite the bed, between two large windows, a chest of drawers with a white marble top; above this, in a gilt frame, the reflection of a strange figure, half in light, half in shade, moving with a candle in its hand; an escritoire, some big chairs and arm-chairs; these were the only objects that showed up out of the darkness beneath the inquisitive light which ran along the walls, now ascending, now descending, now in curves, in zig-zags, like the uncertain light of a will o' the wisp. At the top of the bed hung an admirable painting, the head of an angel praying, after the school of Guercino. The expression was that of complete abandonment; in the half-closed mouth, the dilated nostrils, the almost passionate glance, could be seen the movement of intense supplication. One would have said that those pillows were accustomed to support the heads of great sinners, and that during the hours of slumber, when sinful schemes and actions are for the time laid aside, a spirit of mercy lifted its voice in prayer to God for them. The light from Silla's candle appeared fascinated by that picture. It left it suddenly, but only to stop again and turn back to it, passing over

its surface from top to bottom, from right to left. Then the light slowly passed on and took its original course, as though its path had remained traced in mid-air, following the same curves, falling and rising as before. This time, however, it found something changed. As the light fell upon the gilded frame above the chest of drawers, the same figure was reflected, half in light, half in shade, but its expression was no longer that of curiosity, but rather of emotion and amazement. If indeed that mirror had been able to preserve the reflections thrown from it in the course of its vain and sterile existence, among others would have appeared the sad face of a woman, the merry one of a boy, strongly resembling each other in their features and in the expression of the eyes. Just as in some quiet lake the mountains see their reflection smiling back at them in the morning light, and then the mists enwrap them and blur their outline so that the watery mirror appears turned to lead; and then again the veil is lifted and the brown mountain sides are once more reflected; so similarly there appeared once more in the faithful mirror, after many years, the reflected portrait of the youth, changed to the thoughtful features of a man.

Silla turned round and approached the bed, trembling, looked at it for a long time, put down the candle, joined his hands, and bent down and kissed the cold and shining wood. Then, rising up, he went out with hasty strides on to the staircase, leaving the candle behind him. A blind instinct led him to go in search of the Count, to speak to him at once. But the house was dark and silent, nothing was to be heard but the ticking of the clock. Steinegge was safe in bed; and, after all, could he have answered his question? Silla returned slowly to his room. Against the light of the candle placed on the floor on the other side of it, the bed stood out like a

huge black cube. Had anyone been sleeping there one would not have seen him; and Silla's imagination easily conjured up a woman's form that once had rested there, saw her lying there ill, shrinking from the weird light, motionless, perchance, but still alive. He approached the bed on tip-toe, and flung himself upon it with arms outstretched.

She was sleeping elsewhere, that pure and noble mother, in a narrower chamber, upon a colder bed, and yet he seemed to feel her presence still; his childhood returned and made his heart feel young, bringing a flood of memories of his mother's room and of the bed, the scent of a favourite box of sandalwood, little things his mother had said to him, many different aspects of that vanished face. When he got up and, holding up the candle, looked about him, he could not understand how he had failed to at once recognise the picture, the chairs, the mirror, which now all looked down upon him as though reproaching him with his forgetfulness.

How came it to pass, thought Silla, how came it to pass that the furniture of his mother's room was there in an unknown house belonging to a man whose face he had never seen, whose name he had not even heard uttered? Some things had indeed been sold some years previous to his mother's death, and perhaps they had come into Count d'Ormengo's possession by chance. By chance? Ah, no, it was not possible.

He sat down at the escritoire, took out a large square envelope from his pocket-book, read the letter, re-read it with feverish attention. It ran as follows:—

'R——, 10*th August* 1861.

'My Dear Sir,—We have never met, and you in all probability have never heard my name, although it is

that of an old Italian family which has ever borne it, at home and abroad, on foot and on horseback, as it should be borne. It is necessary, to come to the point, for your sake and for mine, that we should meet. As I am fifty-nine you will come to me.

'You will find a chaise waiting for you the evening of the day after to-morrow at —— Station on the Milan-Camerlata line; and you will find at my house the unceremonious hospitality which I practise towards my friends, who on their part are good enough to respect my peculiarities. Allow me to mention that among these is the habit of opening the window if a chimney smokes in my house, and of opening, if a man smokes, the door. I await you, my dear sir, in my hermitage,

'CESARE D'ORMENGO.'

That was all. He knew the letter by heart, but had some idea of reading between the lines, of discovering some *double entendre*. Nothing of the kind; or rather, the mystery was there, but was one too deep for hand or eye to fathom. Was he friend or foe, this man who silently placed before him the memories of his mother and of his happy childhood?

No foe. He wrote with the rough frankness of a nobleman of the old school; the large letters, leaning over as in the impetus of a race, breathed sincerity. His hospitality was certainly unceremonious; not to show himself even. The more reason for believing in the cordial terms of the invitation. Eccentric, in short, but benevolent.

And what reason can he have had for collecting those objects and putting them in his house so many years ago, and for now summoning Silla to a conference? Silla had never heard his name mentioned either by his mother or his father, or anyone else. He let the letter

fall, and covered his face with his hands. A glimmering of light flashed across his mind, perhaps a glimmering of the truth. That furniture had been sold the day after the financial crash; a number of plunderers, Silla remembered in a confused kind of way, had descended upon the house to enforce their own claims, or those of powerful creditors, who kept in the background, so as to pose as friends of the family, or from less dishonourable motives; and in addition to the realisation of house and land, pictures and furniture of great value had been carried off, fetching next to nothing, stolen as it were in a kind of indecent scramble. Count d'Ormengo, perhaps, as one of the creditors, had profited unduly by the zeal of some unscrupulous agent, and was now anxious to square accounts with his own conscience. Possibly somebody had informed him that Silla was out of work and living in poverty. This had led the Count to take the initiative, to speak of something being necessary for both of them, alluding in the opening words of his letter to the family honour; and to give his guest this particular room was a way of breaking the ice before meeting face to face. The dull sound of footsteps overhead roused Silla. He listened awhile and thought he heard a window open. His own room had two; he hesitated a moment, and then resolutely opened one.

He remained in astonishment with his hand on the window. The sky was clear as crystal. The crescent moon rose on the left above lofty mountains, shedding a feeble light over a big grey wall that ran along beside his window, and over the severe outlines of other windows of the castle; the big wall rose straight up out of the bright surface of a clear stretch of water lying towards low hills in the west, while the other side of the lake was in deep shadow. The rustling of invisible leaves was

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heard hard by, the wind whispered softly as it rippled over the water and died away in the distance.

'How do you like it?' said a voice from the floor above, a little to the right of Silla's room. 'A little *Föhn*, a little *Föhn*.' The voice was Steinegge's, who, leaning out of a window, was smoking like a chimney. The Count must have been sleeping soundly a good distance away for his secretary to venture to talk so loud, in spite of the silence of the night and the sonorous echo from the lake beneath them. He hastened to inform Silla that he had served on a galley at Constantinople as a result of political troubles, and that the abominable Turkish sentries broke his sleep every two hours with their fantastic cry of Allah-al-allah! From that time he had retained the habit of waking up every two hours every night of his life. He used to go to the window in his nightshirt and smoke; if the Count knew of it there would be trouble! When he was serving as captain in the Austrian Hussars, before 1848, he had been accustomed to smoke as many as eighteen Virginians a day; since that time he had gone many a day without food, without tobacco never! The Count's *régime* did not agree with him, it acted on his nerves.

'Might I ask you,' rejoined Silla, interrupting these reminiscences, 'whether you can tell me why the Count has sent for me.'

'May I go back to the Turkish galleys if I have the faintest idea. I know that his lordship knew you; that is all.'

Silla relapsed into silence.

'Aaah! Aaah! Aaah!' yawned Steinegge, in a cloud of smoke and geniality.

'What lake is this?' asked Silla.

'You don't know? You have never seen it? I be-

lieve that many Italians are quite ignorant of its existence, and it is curious that I should have to tell you about it.'

'Well?'

'Oh, the devil.'

A shadow that passed rapidly across the water in the direction of the castle drew this exclamation from Steinegge, who was only just in time to throw away his cigar and to close the window. A falling star passed Silla, the windows above were slammed to, the leaves rustled behind the castle. Steinegge, fearing that he had allowed a puff of smoke to enter the room, and sniffing at the faithless air, turned into bed, to dream that as he left the Turkish galley the padischah smilingly offered him the Imperial pipe, filled with good Smyrna tobacco.

Silla remained long at the window. The clear night, the fresh breeze, the sweet scent from the mountains did him good, restored calmness to his thoughts and peace to his heart. He was hardly conscious of the flight of the hours as he followed absently, and yet with attention, the mad pranks of the wind upon the lake, the murmurs of the night, the whispering of the leaves, the calm progress of the silvery moon. He heard a deep-tongued bell strike the hour in the distance. Two o'clock or three? He hardly knew, as he got up with a sigh and closed the window. For he felt that he ought to go to bed and get some rest, so as to have a clear brain on the morrow for his interview with the Count. But sleep did not come. He lighted a candle and walked about the room; but it was of no avail. He set himself to seek memories and thoughts far from his present anxieties, and at length he seemed to have found something, for he sat down at the escritoire and, after lengthy reflection composed, with a hundred pauses and interruptions, the following letter to *Cecilia*;—

'It was to my book, *A Dream*, that I owed the pleasure and the honour of your first letter. While I was replying to it I indeed dreamt a dream, another and a better and a nobler dream than the dream of my story. Shall I tell it to you? No, for you would only smile; and the pseudonym which stands on the frontispiece of that book and at the foot of this letter covers an individuality not wanting in self-respect. Your second letter reached me, and, like many other illusions which have tempted, and then mocked at, my youth, that dream also vanished, and life lies stretched out before me a barren, painful path. We can have no sympathies in common, and we therefore say farewell. You disguised in your elegant domino "Cecilia," I retiring behind my "Lorenzo," which you condemn as vulgar, but which is dear to me because it was once borne, some fifty years ago, by a great poet whom I revere. For my part, no curiosity will ever urge me to seek to know your real name. I shall be grateful if you will abstain from inquiries as to mine.

'When you wrote to me asking for my opinion on the subject of free-will and on the transmigration of souls, I imagined that none but a woman of wide sympathies could occupy herself with problems so far above the accustomed pursuits of the fashionable herd. It seems to me that your wish was no passing fancy of an idle mind which, between one pleasure and another, perchance between one love affair and another, peeps in to see what he is doing who thinks, studies, and toils; and, as a matter of caprice, would wish to taste the strong bitter potion distilled by philosophy and science. I conjectured, even, that some event in your past life, as to which you were silent, had caused you to doubt, and cast across your soul the shadow of those mysteries in regard to which you invoked my judgment. I replied, I

must confess, with foolish enthusiasm, with an ingenuousness of expression which must appear in the worst possible taste to your false world (pardon the frank speech of a masquerader who has no wish to give offence)—to your false world where the women seek to hide their wrinkles and the men their youth. I have, in fact, behaved like an ill-bred *bourgeois* who calmly attempts to shake hands with a noble lady to whom he has not been introduced. You withdraw your hand, and assail me with a cloud of barbed arrows which sting though they do not wound, and lash me with your pungent sarcasm, the intellectual armoury of people refined up to the utmost limit of sprightly subtlety; just as certain delicate creatures live entirely on sweets. I appreciate, I do not esteem, such wit; wit *à la Française*, sceptical and false. I see an image of it now in the mirror of the water which, rising and falling beneath the moonlight, converts the soft rays into an empty shimmer, and fugitive specks of light.

'Your sarcasms do not hurt me, I am cynical; I have seen women who have fallen in love, perhaps after struggling against it, who defended themselves in this way, as little captive birds do with their harmless beaks. No, what attracted me was not the prospect of a flirtation at a *bal masqué*, but the hope of a serious confidential correspondence with an enthusiast for the same lofty themes which fascinate my own soul. I had intended to close this correspondence; and you must attribute this letter to an attack of insomnia, from which, and from some other troubles, the writing of it helps to divert me. Whether we ever met in a previous existence I do not remember; nor do I know what brilliant star will be worthy to receive you when you have quitted this *bourgeois* planet of ours, this low, scandal-loving earth, on

which, for a goddess, there is no suitable resting-place; but—'

Whether it was that at this point the candle began to go out, or that drowsiness at last settled on his brain, when morning broke Silla was sleeping at the table, and in the middle of the sheet of paper, like a weapon blunted as it was about to strike, stood the ambiguous monosyllable—'but.'

CHAPTER II

THE CASTLE

'THIS way, sir,' said the servant whom Silla was following, 'his lordship is in the library.'

'Is that the door?'

'Yes, sir.'

Silla paused to read the following words, a free quotation from the prophet Hosea, inscribed on a marble tablet above the door:

'*Loquar ad cor ejus in solitudine.*'

The poetical words breathed affection, yet the marble clothed them in a certain austere solemnity. The vagueness of the language, the grave rigidity of the lifeless Latin forms combined to produce a sense of something superhuman. As Silla read, he felt his sense of reverence touched by the solemn phrase.

The servant opened the door, and with a loud voice announced the visitor.

'Signor Silla.'

The latter, not a little agitated, entered hurriedly.

Many learned book-collectors know the castle library; a large room, almost square, lighted by two fine windows in the west wall facing the lake, and by a glass door which opens into a little garden laid out on the stone

terrace above the boat-house. A large, old-fashioned fireplace and mantel of black marble, ornamented with cupids and arabesques in stucco, face the windows; while a huge bronze lamp hangs from the ceiling, above a round table which is usually piled up with magazines and books. The most striking piece of furniture in the room is a tall eight-day clock, a *chef d'œuvre* of the eighteenth century, which stands between the two windows. The case, carved in semi-relief, displays allegorical scenes representing the Seasons linked between two figures of Fame, the one flying and sounding a clarion, the other with drooping wings and trumpet falling to the ground. The quadrant is upheld by graceful, dancing figures, the Hours; and above them a little winged figure takes its flight, with, at its feet, the word ψυχη.

I know not whether the noble family into whose possession the castle passed a few months ago has left the library intact; but at the time of my story the walls were concealed by lofty bookcases. The books were the result of accumulations by generations of country gentlemen of widely different opinions and tastes. The resulting contradictions were recorded in those shelves, and certain classes of books appeared astonished at having survived their collectors. Not a single work on chemistry was to be found among the numerous volumes of metaphysics, both by foreign and native authors; but behind works on religious discipline and theology lurked novels of the lightest order. The library owes its fame to the noble editions of the classics, and to a copious collection of the Italian Romanticists, and of works on mathematics and tactics, all previous to 1800. Count Caesar ransacked the classics; sent the philosophers and theologians, in his own phrase, heavenwards, and kept the historians and moralists near him. The novelists and the poets,

Dante and Alfieri excepted, were thrown into a big box and deposited in a mouldy warehouse. The empty shelves were filled by foreign works, mostly of English origin, dealing with history, politics and statistics. Not a single volume found admission, under the Count's *régime*, which dealt with literature, art, philosophy or political econony; and, as he was ignorant of German, Teutonic authors were excluded.

The owner of the library was there, seated at the table, a long, thin figure clothed in black. He rose as Silla entered, and came to greet him, speaking with a strongly marked Piedmontese accent.

'You are Signor Corrado Silla.'

'Yes, Count.'

'I am greatly obliged to you for coming to visit me.'

His voice was soft and gentle, and he pressed the young man's hand warmly.

'I presume,' he resumed, 'that you were surprised not to see me yesterday.'

'Some other things surprised me,' replied his guest, 'but—'

The Count chimed in with 'Enough, enough. I am glad to hear you say that, for it is only fools and swindlers who are never surprised at anything. My secretary no doubt informed you, either in German or Italian, that I always go to bed before ten o'clock. The habit strikes you as strange? Perhaps it is, for I have observed the custom for five-and-twenty years. And how did that rascally cardriver treat you?'

'He drove very well.'

The Count motioned Silla to a chair and sat down himself, and continued,—

'And now, would you like to know to what place he drove you?'

'It is not unnatural,' said Silla, and relapsed into silence.

'Oh, I sympathise with your feelings, but with your permission I will postpone the subject till this evening. Till then, favour me by being a friend who comes to see me in the plenitude of his leisure, or a literary man who is inclined to dip into my books and test the capacities of my *chef*. I can hardly broach business with a guest who has only just crossed my threshold. This evening we will have a chat. I fancy that you will not find yourself so uncomfortable here that I shall not be able to induce you to stay on a little longer.'

'On the contrary,' replied Silla, impetuously; 'but I think you might perhaps tell me—'

'Tell you about a little surprise which you found on your arrival? Perhaps, indeed, I do owe you something on that score; and I can only appeal to your courtesy and ask you to reserve the subject till this evening. In the meantime, if you will come with me I will show you my castle, as those clowns of peasants call it. They might leave to our glorious modern civilisation the habit of calling very small things by very big names! My house, he added, rising to his feet, is a shell—a shell which has been inhabited by many shell-fish of diverse temperaments. The tastes of the first seem to have been somewhat ambitious; you may notice that he has adorned the outer shell of his dwelling regardless of expense. None of his successors had epicurean tastes, for which, indeed, a shell is hardly adapted. For myself, I have the misanthropic temperament, and allow my habitation to get grimier every day.'

Silla did not insist, he felt the influence of a stronger will. The Count, tall and incredibly thin, with his fine head and rough shock of white hair, and his stern eyes

and rugged features, his olive complexion and clean shaven face, was a striking figure. In his deep bass voice could be discerned rich capacities for love and hate. His voice vibrated with passion, throwing a wealth of life and originality into the most commonplace phrases; its tones came up direct from the cavities of a large heart, of a chest of bronze, in contradistinction to certain thin acid voices that seem to discharge their notes only from the tongue.

He was dressed in a long frock coat, cut clumsily about the wrists, from which issued two fine white hands. He wore an old-fashioned black cravat.

'First of all,' he said, pointing to his books, 'allow me to present you to the friends in whose society I pass much of my time. Some of them are excellent people, some of them are scoundrels, a large majority are imbeciles, and these I have sent, being a good Christian, as near to heaven as I could. Among them are poets, romanticists and savants. I need not scruple to say this, although you are somewhat of a literary man, for I made the same remark to D'Azeglio, who, with all his scribbling propensities, has a good deal of common sense, and it set him laughing. The theologians are represented too. Those white Dominicans come to me from my great-uncle, a bishop of Novara, who had plenty of time to waste. As for my own friends, they are all close at hand, and I trust you will make their acquaintance. In the meantime, let us take a turn, if you are so inclined.'

The castle stood at the entrance to a retired valley where the lake of —— hides itself between two wooded hills. Built in the style of the eighteenth century, it faces the south with its left wing, and the east with its right one. Two arcades, the one of five arches on the side of the lake, and the other of three arches towards

the mountains, run obliquely between the two wings at the height of the first floor, and join them in a point resting upon a huge mass of black stone projecting above the lake. The tools of the gardener have cut in the hard rock a shallow bed in which compost has been laid, and here purslains, verbenas and petunias bloom in careless splendour. The wing which contains the library, built perhaps as a summer resort, throws its grave reflection in the waters of the bay. In front of it is a solitary hill-side covered with hazel trees and hornbeans; on the right is a spacious and fertile valley, into which the overflow of the lake escapes; behind the castle roof appear vines and cypresses, as though peeping over into the green waters of the lake, which is here so clear that when the mid-day sun strikes down in summer full upon it, the eye can see far down among the motionless water-weeds, and catch now and again the passing shadow of a fish moving slowly above the yellow pebbles.

The left wing commands the open lake, mountains in front, mountains in the east; in the west, towards the plains, a background of hills and, between, cultivated fields divided by rows of poplars. Between the east and south the lake winds round behind a promontory, a tall, reddish rock, and there hides the waters of its smaller and shallower end. The lake is a small one, small in size and in renown, yet ambitious and proud, proud of its crown of mountain summits. Full of passion, full of change; now violet, now green, now leaden; sometimes, as it nears the plains, even blue. There it breaks into a laugh, and reflects the rich colouring of the clouds glowing in the setting sun, or becomes one bright sheet of flame when the south wind ripples across it beneath the mid-day glare of July. On all other sides extend the

mountains, wooded to the summit, with here and there a dusky heap of rock or a bright emerald patch of pasture. Towards the east the lake is bounded by a valley, and the hills there ascend terrace-like towards the Alpe dei Fiori, distant rocky summits which cut the sky line with their jagged tops. Down that valley, not far distant from the lake, one sees a little village church, and on the opposite side, on the brow of the hill, that slopes down gently to the meadows, the white roof of a bell-tower peeps up from amid the walnut trees.

Where the castle abuts on the mountain sides pick-axe and mattock have vigorously assailed the rock, and have wrested space for the little semi-circular court where a sparkling fountain plays; its waters falling back again among the graceful geraniums and the broad leaves of the arums. Two large oval beds of flowers and foliage plants flank it on either side. Beyond them are fine white sandy paths. Along the walls that touch the mountain sides wind the thousand tendrils of the virginian creepers and jessamine, tender plants which seek on all sides for a support, and when they have found one, clothe it, as though in gratitude, with beauty. Opposite the centre of the main wall of the castle and facing the loggia, between the south and east wings, broad stone flights of steps have been built up the hill side, flanked on either hand by huge cypresses and by marble statues. On the right and left, serried lines of vines stretch away into the distance, marshalled like regiments on parade. Some of the cypresses have lost their top branches, and show the black scars left by lightning, but most of them are intact, noble in their ancient grandeur. They look like huge giants striding slowly down the hill to bathe in the

lake below; while all nature around them looks on in silent wonder.

Of the statues, but nine or ten still grace their pedestals, and they are closely veiled in twining ivy. Their bare arms emerge, like those of threatening Sibyls, or rather of nymphs overcome and turned to stone by some strange metamorphosis. In sympathy with this idea, the gardener's son would often place in their hands bunches of leaves and flowers. At the summit of the stone staircase is a large reservoir formed of elegant grey stonework, with mosaic in white, red and black, divided into five arches corresponding to as many niches, each containing a marble vase. In the centre a nude figure of a Naïad turns over her vase with her foot, and there flows thence a stream of water which descends by a hidden conduit, and reappears in the fountain among the flowers in the court. On the pedestal of the statue are inscribed the famous words of Heraclitus: ΠΑΝΤΑ ΡΕΕΙ.

From the balcony, which is placed at the east end of the castle, one emerges into a little garden on the stone terrace, which is shaded almost entirely from the noonday sun by the foliage of a superb magnolia. An open flight of steps leads from this garden down to a point near the little door of the boat-house, and to one of the outer gates. From here a rough track leads to the village of R—.

At the other end of the castle a solid balustrade is supported by pillars, which in turn rest on the rocks which lurk like monsters of the deep beneath the lake. Behind the balustrade is a broad drive, on the other side of which are flower beds, bright with foliage plants and flowers. In the summer time, great pots of lemon trees stand on the balustrade and are reflected in the

clear waters of the lake. At the bottom of the drive the outer wall of the park is concealed by a little belt of pine trees, which wind along with it, like a black velvet ribbon, up the hillside, twining around the gardener's cottage near an iron gate, through which, by a steep pathway known to him, the high road may be reached.

With its cypresses, its vineyards, its belt of pine trees, and with the lake lying at its feet, the castle would make a pleasing photograph enough if science could reproduce the varying shades of dull and bright green, the transparent waters of the lake, and the reflection of the sun as it plays on the old walls. One could then imagine, stretched out before its windows, a broad expanse of lake, smiling villages, gardens bright with flowers. But, viewed even in its severe solitude, the castle is not gloomy. Outside the castle precincts, that part of the estate which faces south is green with olive trees, and its aspect speaks to the mildness of the winters. Through the open portals of the great gate that looks across the plains in the west, one's eye and one's imagination wander freely; one conjures up the image, one almost thinks one hears the hum, of the busy human life beyond. The castle dominates that isolated site in aristocratic grandeur; its owner may well think himself lord of all he surveys; deem himself a king to whom none dares draw near, the mountains defending his throne, and the waves lapping its feet.

'They say,' said the Count, as he entered the loggia with Silla, 'that the view from this point is not bad, and I confess myself I have seen worse.' Then pointing to a tablet above the middle arch of the loggia, he added, 'Read that,' and Silla read as follows:—

EMANUEL DE ORMENGO
TRIBUNATU MILITARI APUD SABAUDOS FUNCTUS
MATERNO IN AGRO
DOMUM
MAGNO AQUARUM ATQUE MONTIUM SILENTIO CIRCUMFUSAM
ÆDIFICAVIT
UT SE FESSUM BELLO
POTENTIUM INGRATITUDINE LABORANTEM
HUC
VESPERASCENTE VITA RECIPERET
ATQUE NEPOTES
IN PARI FORTUNA
PARI OBLIVIONE
FRUERENTUR

—

MDCCVII.

'Ah!' exclaimed the Count, standing behind Silla, his legs apart and his hands clasped behind him. 'My worthy ancestor experienced royal favour and repudiated it, as you see. It is for this reason that I myself would have none of it, and I would never serve a king unless I had to choose between him and our *canaille* of a democracy. That ancestor of mine was a man of iron. Only kings and democracies would break and throw away a similar instrument. Ugh! Perhaps you do not believe me?'

'I am devoted to my king,' replied the young man, with some emotion. 'I have fought for him and for Italy.'

'Ah! for Italy! Nothing could be better. But you speak of the passing conditions of the present day, while I refer to institutions that are judged by the testimony of centuries. My own secretary is a democrat, and I have a high opinion of him, for he is the best and most honest creature in the world. For the rest, if you have an ideal I am the last person to wish to destroy it, for without an ideal all feeling is merged in sensuality.'

'And your own ideal?' rejoined Silla.

'Mine? Look around you.'

The Count stepped up to the parapet above the lake.

'You see where I have chosen my home, among the noblest natural surroundings, amidst a magnificent aristocracy, not wealthy indeed, but powerful. Its view is wide, it defends the plains, husbands the forces of the industrial life of the district, distributes pure and life-giving air, and takes nothing in return for all these benefits except its own majestic grandeur. Possibly you understand what is my political ideal and why I live far from the world; *respublica mea non est de hoc mundo.* Let us be going.'

The Count was an excellent guide, drawing Silla's attention to every object of interest and explaining the ideas of the iron ancestor who had built the castle as though they had originated in his own brain. The old soldier had done things *en grand seigneur.* A wing of the castle for winter, another for summer, three storeys to each. Kitchens, pantries, offices, servants' rooms; a grand staircase in the west wing; noble reception rooms on the first floor. Frescoes adorned these, painted in fantastic confusion by an unknown artist who had heaped together architecture of the Renaissance, loggias, terraces and obelisks, and fantastical scenes depicting cavalry skirmishes, in which the drawing was incorrect and violated nearly all the maxims of Leonardo da Vinci, but which were not devoid of vigour.

'I understand from my friends,' said the Count, showing them to Silla, 'that the good man who painted these was a stupid fellow; some even go so far as to call him a cow. I know nothing about these things, but I am glad to hear it; for the artists are no favourites of mine.'

It was true enough, he neither liked artists nor understood them. He had a large collection of pictures, the

best of which were collected by his mother, *née* the Marchioness B—— of Florence, who was passionately fond of art. The Count was absolutely ignorant of the subject, and used to terrify his friends by calmly uttering the most heretical opinions whenever he spoke of it. He would gladly have turned face to the wall a portrait by Raphael, or have thrown a Titian on the rubbish-heap. He regarded them only as so much dirty canvas, and would not have concealed his opinion for any consideration whatever. The earliest masters were less distasteful to him, because he found them more archaic and less artistic; less artistic and therefore better citizens.

At the same time he could give no reason for this opinion. Landscape painting was his special aversion; he regarded it as a sign of social decadence, an art inspired by scepticism, by a repudiation of social duties and a kind of sentimental materialism. He was not the man to part with his mother's favourite pictures, but he kept them prisoner in a long passage on the second floor, on the north side above the dining-room.

In entering this corridor by one end it seemed to Silla that someone beat a hasty retreat through the door at the other, and he noticed that his companion's eyes flashed. The three windows of the gallery were wide open, but could that perfume of 'mown-hay scent' come through the open windows?

One of the old leather high-backed chairs that were ranged at equal intervals along the walls of the gallery, and gave to it an air of almost episcopal dignity, had been dragged alongside the window in the middle and placed facing a Canaletto of marvellous beauty. On the window ledge lay an open book, much dog-eared but perfectly clean and white.

'You see,' said the Count, calmly closing the first of

the three windows, 'I have here some extraordinary possessions. Mountains, woods, plains, rivers, lakes, and even a fair collection of seas.'

'But they are treasures!' exclaimed Silla.

'Ah! the canvas is very old, and of the poorest quality.'

With this remark the Count replaced the high-backed chair in its proper place.

'How can you talk of canvas? Now take this Venetian subject for example.'

'I don't even care for Venice, although I am told that it is highly valued. Think of that!'

He took up the book which was on the ledge of the second window, closed the volume, glanced at the frontispiece and, as though he were doing the most natural thing in the world, threw it out into the courtyard and shut the window. A heavy crash followed, with the noise of broken panes, and a hail of bits of glass falling on the gravel. The Count turned to Silla, continuing his conversation as though nothing had happened.

'I have ever held in detestation that garish, reeking, ragged city of Venice, which is dropping, piecemeal, her greasy courtesan's cloak, and begins to show some half-soiled linen, and a shrivelled, dirty skin. You say to yourself, this man is a coarse fellow. Do you not? Yes, others have intimated to me the same thing. And naturally. But remember that I am a great admirer of the old Venetians, that I have relations at Venice, and a dash of Venetian blood in my veins, and that of the best. I am a man of plain speech, of a school new to Italy, where, Heaven knows, there is no lack of sensuous fools. Where will you find an educated Italian who will talk to you of art in the way that I have done? The

large majority know nothing whatever about it, but they take good care not to confess the fact. It is curious to stand and listen to a group of these fools and hypocrites in front of a picture or a statue, and to watch their desperate exertions in expressing admiration, each one believing that he has to deal with connoisseurs. If they could all simultaneously remove their masks, what a shout of laughter you would hear.'

He stepped up to the third window and called out, 'Enrico.'

An almost child-like voice replied,—

'I am coming, sir.'

The Count waited a moment, and then added,—

'Bring me up that book.'

Then he shut the window.

Silla could not tear himself away from the pictures.

'I could stay here all day,' he said.

'What! even you?'

Who was the other person who came here? Perhaps the young lady of whom the driver had spoken to him? Did the arm-chair out of its place, the book, the scent of 'mown-hay,' testify to her recent presence? That hurried closing of the door, that flash of anger in the eyes of the Count?

Up to this moment Silla had only seen the Count, Steinegge and the servants. Nobody had even mentioned other inmates of the castle.

A few hours later, after having gone all over the garden and the castle without meeting anyone, he retired to his room to dress, and as he went into the dining-room with the Count and Steinegge, he observed that four covers were laid, one at each side of the table. The guests of the north, south and west took their places; but the unknown one of the east failed to appear.

The Count left the room, but returned after ten minutes and ordered the cover to be removed.

'I had hoped,' he said, turning to Silla 'to introduce you to my niece, but it would seem that she is feeling indisposed.'

Silla expressed regret; Steinegge, more formal than ever, went on eating, keeping his eyes fixed on his plate; the Count looked very glum, and even the butler wore a mysterious expression. All through dinner the only sounds in the cool, shaded, room were the obsequious tread of the butler and the clinking of plates and glasses, which resounded among the echoes of the roof. Through the half-open windows was heard the noisy chirp of many grasshoppers; one saw the glint of sunlight falling on the green leaves of the vines, and the changing hue of the grass as it bent hither and thither before the breeze. The prospect outside was more cheerful than that within.

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER III

PHANTOMS OF THE PAST

THE sun had set and the grasshoppers had ceased to chirp. The wooded hillside facing the library stood out in dark outline against the clear, orange-coloured sky, from which a last warm ray of light fell on the marble floor near the windows, and outside on the clear brown leaves of the magnolia, and on the gravel of the little garden. Through the open window came the fresh air from the valley and the twittering of the sparrows in the cypresses.

The Count, seated at his usual place, had his elbows resting on the table and his face covered in his hands. Silla, sitting opposite to him, was waiting for him to speak.

But the Count seemed to be turned to stone; he neither spoke nor moved. Now and then he gave a sign of life when he raised his eight thin, nervous, fingers from his forehead, stretched them out, then again clasped his brow as though he wished to press them into the bone.

Silla watched a little shadow flitting across the floor, the shadow of a sparrow which could not find its way out, and was dashing itself wildly hither and thither, along the bookshelves and across the ceiling.

Behind the stern brow of the old nobleman there was a wild flood of thoughts which could not find their way out. It was the hour which brings unrest to the heart; that hour in which the light that guides us fails, and things corporeal and intellectual feel themselves free, as it were, from a vigilance that has become wearisome. Hills seem to leisurely lay themselves down flat upon the plain, fields spread themselves over villages and dwellings, the shadows take form and shape, human forms disappear in mist. In the heart of man, the impressions, the thoughts, the present, sink into oblivion, and are replaced by a confused upward movement of distant memories, of phantoms that move our pity, and lead us to sigh in secret.

Presently, with a sudden movement, the Count raised his face and said,—

'Signor Silla!'

Then after a moment's silence he slowly resumed,—

'When you read my letter, the name which you found subscribed to it was unknown to you?'

'Quite unknown.'

'There was in your mind not even the faintest memory of this name?'

'Not the faintest.'

'Among those who brought you up, did you never hear any mention made of one who would be in a position to assist you should you find yourself in difficulty?'

'No. Who is supposed to have spoken to me in this way?'

The Count hesitated a moment, and then repeated, in a low voice,—

'Those who brought you up.'

'Never!'

'At least you will remember that you have seen my face before?'

Silla was taken aback by the manner in which the Count persisted, but simply replied,—

'I have no such recollection.'

'Well,' rejoined the Count, 'one day, nineteen years ago, a day in which you had been punished severely for breaking a vase that stood in a dark room where you had been locked up, you then saw me for an instant.'

Silla jumped to his feet; the Count rose also, and after a moment's silence, walked round the table and stood near his interlocutor, placing himself sideways to the dying glow of the setting sun.

'Do you remember now?' he asked.

Silla replied in confusion that he did not remember seeing the Count, but he did remember breaking the vase, and then, after his punishment, seeking refuge in his mother's room.

'You see that I have known you for a long time. You must feel that. And now I am going to tell you what I know about you.'

The Count set to work to walk up and down as he talked. His deep voice went rising and falling among the dark shadows of the room, his strange figure was now in light, now in shade, as he crossed before the windows and then passed on.

'You were born at Milan, in the Via del Monte di Pietà, in 1834. Your mother brought you up, your father gave you a silver cradle and a maid who passed in the world as your nurse. This woman died soon after leaving your service. You disliked her cordially. Did you not?'

'I don't remember. They have told me so. I heard it more than once from my mother.'

'No doubt. Do you wish to know how far back your memory goes? You were five years old. You had been put to bed an hour earlier than usual. During the day there had been an unwonted bustle among the servants, and much going and coming of carpenters and the like, with an immense accumulation of confectionery and flowers. Late that night you were awakened by the strains of music. Then the door of your room opened. Your mother came in, bent over you, kissed you.'

'My lord!' exclaimed Silla, in a hoarse voice, 'how do you come to know all these things?'

'Some years later,' resumed the deep voice of the Count, without further explanation, 'when you were thirteen, that is to say in 1847, something unusual occurred in your household.'

The deep voice relapsed into silence, the Count stood still some distance off, near the door leading into the little garden.

'Is that not so?' he asked.

Silla made no reply.

The Count resumed his walk.

'Perhaps it is cruel,' he went on, 'to recall these details, but I am no friend of modern sentimentality; and I hold that it is beneficial to a man to go over the lessons he has learnt from adversity, and to renew the pain which preserves their precepts in his mind. Besides, pain, believe me, is a fine tonic; and in certain cases it is a comforting sign of the vitality of the moral sense. For where there is no pain there is gangrene. To return, therefore. In 1847 something unusual occurred. You went to pass a few days at Sesto with the C——s. Your carriage, on the return journey, stopped before another house in the Via Molino delle Armi. It was a very different house from that in the Via del

Monte di Pietà, and the life which you led there was a very different life. The new house was badly furnished, and you had few servants. You know where part of your old furniture is to be found.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, of course, they were sold.'

'But how do you—'

'That is another matter, we will speak of that later on. What was I saying? Ah, you went to live in a fifth floor in the Via Molino delle Armi. From your bed room window you could see our mountains here. At this time you had already indulged in the usual dream of becoming a great man, and filling the world with your name.'

'It appears to me, Count,' said Silla, 'that you have said enough. Pray, tell me what you desire of me.'

'Later on. It is not enough. I am about to tell you facts about yourself of which you are ignorant. Your salutary dream of a glorious future preserved you from the usual dissipations of the young. Unfortunately, your ambitions took a literary turn instead of pursuing a line of action. Allow me to go on. I am an old man. And so you took to literature. But you were lacking in the force of character and reliance on yourself which were necessary for a manful pursuit of this career. Instead of wrapping yourself up in your literature, you went off to Pavia. What did you study at Pavia?'

'Law.'

'You studied everything, except law. Oh! I know—you wanted a profitable employment, thinking of your poor mother, but in that case you should have given yourself up to it like a man; have cut away half your heart and pushed forward with what remained. What

did you do on your return from Pavia? You published a novel. Now here comes a fact of which you are ignorant. The small sum of money which your mother gave you to defray the expenses of publication was not, as she led you to believe, a gift from her relations; the day before she had disposed of her remaining jewellery —cherished family relics—to a goldsmith.'

'What right have you?' cried Silla, springing towards the Count. 'What right have you to know of these things?'

'My right? A very idle question. Your right is to look me full in the face.'

The Count rang the bell.

Silla remained silent, breathing hard. The Count went to open the door, and remained until he heard a step in the passage.

'A lamp,' said he; and went and sat down at the table.

'It's not true. It's not true,' said Silla, *sottovoce*. 'I was not the bad character that you say. Prove it, if you can.'

The Count made no reply.

'I,' continued Silla, 'who would have given my life's blood for my mother, who worshipped her—I, who did not even wish to take that money because my mother's relatives did not approve of my taking up literature, and because, knowing them, I was afraid of rousing them against my mother on my account.'

The Count laid a finger on his lip. Just then a servant came in with a lamp, placed it on a table and retired.

'When I, my dear sir,' rejoined the Count, 'make a statement as to fact, the fact is as good as proved.'

'But in Heaven's name, who—'

'Let the matter rest where it is. I did not accuse you of voluntarily accepting the sacrifice. You know nothing about it. That is how life goes. Young men have ever the ridiculous vanity that the earth is blessed by their tread, and the sky by their glance, and all the time their parents are toiling and moiling to help them onwards, concealing what they suffer in consequence, at the very time of life when their strength is failing, their spirit is weary, and all the pleasures of life are one by one disappearing.'

'Heavens! if that were true in my case, call me anything you will.'

'I have not invited you to my house in order to insult you. Besides, if you ever have children, you will have to go through the same trials. If I abused you, I should have to abuse myself and the whole foolish human race. To proceed. Your book was not a success. In truth, I feel that I ought to congratulate you on the fact that fortune did not smile on you. In '58—'

The Count paused a moment, and then resumed in a low voice,—

'There is no fear of your forgetting the blow which fell upon you in '58.'

Again he paused, and for some moments unbroken silence reigned.

'At this point I ought to mention,' resumed the Count, 'that if I dwell on the details of your life beyond what is necessary to prove that I know you well, it is because I hope in this manner to better justify the proposals that I am about to make to you. Well, in '59 you did your duty and fought for Italy. Your father—'

'Count!'

'Oh, you know me little if you think I am capable of reflecting on the memory of a man in the presence of his

son, even though he have committed errors and incurred censure. Your father was not at Milan when you returned thither. He was abroad, where I understand he died in May of '62. You found yourself alone with your literature, and were unexpectedly called upon to teach Italian, geography and history in a private school, even the name of which was unknown to you. Did you ever learn how the Directors' choice happened to fall on you?'

'No.'

'It is of no importance. About that time you received an offer from your mother's relatives, the Pernetti Anzati, did you not? They wished you to enter their spinning business, and offered you a handsome salary. I believe that is so?'

'Yes, perhaps I owed this offer to you?'

'Never mind. You refused the offer. Quite right. Well done. Better an occupation that brings little bread and much refinement, than one which turns into money time, health, and a good part of one's mind. However, the school came to grief and has been closed. I imagine that you would not refuse similar honourable employment, and it is to this end that I have begged you to come and see me.'

'I thank you,' said Silla, drily. 'It will, in the first place, enable me to live.'

'Oh,' interrupted the Count, 'who spoke of that? The Pernetti paid over to you, I know, part of your mother's dower, which they once kept back, amounting to fifteen hundred francs. After that—'

'After that,' exclaimed Silla, vehemently, 'after that I should like to know who you are who take such an interest in my affairs?'

The Count waited some time before replying.

'I am an old friend of your mother's family, and I take a deep interest in you for the sake of some persons who were very dear to me. Circumstances have till now kept us far apart; a misfortune which we will now hope to repair. Does this suffice you?'

'Pardon me. It does not suffice. How can it?'

'Very well, let us put my friendship on one side. After all, it is not a benefit which I offer to you, it is a favour which I ask of you. I know that you have much intelligence, a highly-cultivated mind, that you are reliable, and that you have been thrown out of employment. I offer you congenial employment, half scientific, half literary work, for which I have collected the materials, and which I should like to undertake myself if I were a literary man, or at least if I were of your age. All these materials are here, near at hand, and as I desire to be in constant communication with the person who writes the book, the book must be written in my house. The person in question will of course name his terms.'

'I cannot enter into this subject, Count, unless you tell me how you obtained the knowledge of the matters you have mentioned to me.'

'You decline, then, to discuss the question?'

'In this way, yes.'

'And if I were to make use of the good offices of a person who has great influence over you?'

'Do not trouble to do that, Count; there is no such person in the world.'

'I have not said that the person is alive.'

Silla experienced a shock; a cold, sinking feeling went through him.

The Count opened a drawer of the writing-table, drew out a letter and handed it to him.

'Read this,' he said, throwing himself back in his chair,

his hands in his pockets and his chin resting on his chest.

The young man quickly seized the letter, glanced rapidly at the superscription, and was seized with a violent fit of trembling, which prevented him from speaking. It was in his mother's handwriting, and ran thus:—

'For Corrado.'

He trembled so that he was scarcely able to open the letter. The well-loved voice of his mother seemed to him to have descended from the world of spirits in order to utter words which in this life she could not speak, and which had remained buried in her heart, under a stone more weighty than that of the tomb.

The letter ran as follows:—

'If my memory be dear to you, if you feel that I have done ought to earn your love, trust yourself to the honourable man who gives you this letter. From that land of rest in which, by the mercy of God, I hope to be at peace when you read these lines, my blessing be upon you. MOTHER.'

Neither of the two men spoke; one heard a wild, desperate sob, then all was silence.

All of a sudden Silla, against his judgment, against his will, against the impulse of his heart, looked at the Count with such a painful anxiety in his large eyes, that the latter struck furiously on the table with his clenched fist, exclaiming,—

'No!'

'Great heavens! I did not wish to say that!' cried Silla.

The Count rose to his feet, spreading out his arms.

'A venerated friend,' he said.

Silla laid his head on the table and wept.

The Count waited a moment in silence, and then, in a low voice, continued,—

'I saw your mother for the last time a year before her marriage. Since then she wrote me many letters, of which you were the sole theme. It is from them that I learnt so many details of your life. After '58 I continued to receive information from friends of mine at Milan. You will now understand how it is that you see here pieces of furniture from your old house. They recall to me the most virtuous and most high-minded lady who has ever honoured me with her friendship.'

Silla held out both his hands towards him without raising his head.

The Count pressed them both affectionately, holding them for a few moments between his own.

'Well?' he asked.

'Oh!' replied Silla, raising his head.

All that was necessary had been said.

'Very well,' the Count went on; 'now you had better take a turn and get a mouthful of fresh air. I will send my secretary with you.'

He rang the bell, and Steinegge appeared soon afterwards, placing himself, with many smiles, at the disposal of Signor Silla. He expressed gratification at acting as his guide, with a doubt whether the clothes he just then had on were suitable for so honourable a service. They were? He was obliged. Thus at length he set out with Silla, bowing and indulging in an infinity of ceremonies at every door they passed through, as though there was a torpedo lying outside each threshold.

Hardly were they outside the gate in the courtyard when his demeanour entirely changed. Taking his com-

panion by the arm, 'Let us go to R——,' he said. 'I think we ought to try the wine there, my dear sir.'

'No,' replied Silla, abstractedly. At present he hardly knew where he was.

'Oh! in what a tone you said that! You are serious, I see, very serious. Very well, then, I am most serious too.'

Steinegge halted, lighted a cigar, puffed a cloud of smoke into the air, clapped his right hand on his companion's shoulder, and remarked suddenly,—

'It is twelve years ago to-day that my wife died.' He made a step forwards, then turned round and looked at Silla, his arms folded across his chest, his lips pursed up, his eyebrows knit.

'Come, I will tell you all about it,' he added, and again taking Silla by the arm, he moved forward with great strides, now and then making a brief halt.

'I fought for my country in 1848; after that I quitted the Austrian service and went to Nassau, where I fought for the cause of freedom. Well, when the tragedy was ended and the curtain fell, I was mercifully sent across the frontier with my wife and child. We went to Switzerland. There I worked as a navvy, with a pick-axe, on the railway. I don't complain of that, it was honourable toil. I come of good people and was a captain in a cavalry regiment, but for all that it is an honourable thing to have laboured with one's own hands. The unfortunate part was that I did not earn enough. My wife and daughter were hungry and half-starved. So, with the assistance of some kind friends, fellow-countrymen of mine, we emigrated to America. Yes, my dear sir, I have been to America among other places. At New York I sold beer and made a lot of money. Oh! yes, things went well with me there.

'*Es war ein Traum.* It was a dream. My wife fell ill of an nervous disorder. We liked New York, were making money, had many friends there. After all, what are all these things compared to health. We leave New York and arrive in Europe. I write to my relations. They are all reactionaries and bigots. I was born a Catholic, but I don't believe in priests, so I get no reply to my letters. What did it matter to them if my wife died? Then I applied to my wife's relatives. It almost makes one smile, but they hated me because they had hoped to marry their daughter to a rich man, and the little money that my father was unable to deprive me of had been confiscated by the Government. Altogether, a nice state of affairs. However, my brother-in-law happened to come to Nancy while I was there. My wife went with him and the child, hoping soon to get well and to return to me. I accompanied her to the frontier. She was very ill, and at mid-day I had to tear myself away from her. An hour before I left her, she embraced me saying, "Andreas, I have seen my native land in the distance; it is enough, let us remain together." She wished to die where I was, you understand. Eight days afterwards—'

Steinegge completed the sentence with a gesture, and began smoking furiously. Silla spoke never a word, seemed to pay no attention; possibly did not hear what he was saying.

'My wife's relations,' the other went on, 'took my little daughter. This was kind of them, because the child would not have been comfortable alone with me, and, comforting myself with the thought that she was happier, I bore my sufferings with cheerfulness. But will you believe me when I say that they have never written to me about her? I have written to her every

fortnight until two years ago; and I have never had a letter in reply. Perhaps she is dead. And, after all, one goes on drinking and smoking and laughing. Ah!'

After this philosophical peroration, the secretary became silent. The rough little path they were following went slantways over a wooded slope, from the valley in which the castle stood, towards the grimy cottages of R——. Beneath their feet lay the calm waters of the lake. At the castle the windows of the library were still lighted up, and so were two others in the same wing at the corner of the second storey; one facing westwards, the other towards the south. Before reaching the village, the path twisted away between two low stone walls into a field of rye, interspersed with mulberry trees.

'Where are we going?' asked Silla, as they approached the dark entrance to the village.

'Only a little farther,' replied his guide in a cheerful tone.

'I should be glad to stop here.' Steinegge sighed, but answered, 'As you wish. Then we will get off the path.' And they took a few steps behind the wall and sat down on the grass near the hill. 'I consult your pleasure, my dear sir,' said the secretary, 'but it is very bad for you not to drink anything. Friends in adversity are few, and wine is the most faithful of them. It is a pity to neglect it. Show it that you see it with pleasure, and it gladdens your heart; treat it badly, and one day, when you have need of it, it will bite you.'

Silla did not reply.

In his then state of mind it was pleasant to contemplate the dark stillness of the night, without moon or

star. From the valley blew a fresh breath of cold air, scented with the perfume of the woods.

They had been there some minutes when from their right among the cottages was heard the confused sound of many footsteps.

'Angiolina!' someone bawled out. Silence.

'Hi! there! Angiolina!'

A window opened and a woman's voice answered sharply,—

'What do you want?'

'Nothing. Here we are in the *al fresco café*, taking our fresh air like gentlemen, and we should like a little pleasant conversation.'

'Drunken, good-for-nothing fellows! Is this a proper time to sit up talking? You had better go to the public-house if you want that.'

'It is too hot there,' shouted another.

'Much pleasanter out here in the open air. Can't you feel the nice fresh breeze? What's the good of going to sleep? Sheer madness to stop in bed in this hot weather. Even the old gentleman at the castle hasn't gone to bed. The castle windows are still lighted up. Can't you see them?'

'No, not from here. It will be the window of Donna Marina's room.'

'Possibly hers also. But the two bright lights below are the library windows. I ought to know, for it's only the other day that I was up there putting in two panes of glass.'

'They say there are strangers staying at the castle.'

'Yes, there's a young chap from Milan. We heard it this evening from the cook. I suppose he's come for change of air and to pay court to Donna Marina.'

'A happy man who gets her, and a big fool for his

pains,' chimed in the woman. 'Signora Giovanna said the same thing to-day when she was telling the curate's Martha how, this morning, there had been another quarrel, and how the old gentleman had thrown down one of my lady's books out of the window and into the courtyard. Then she turned the place into a pandemonium. Signora Giovanna sides with the old Count, but both he and the lady are mad as hatters. If it were only her name it would prevent my wanting her if I were a man. She has a regular witch's name, you know—Malombra.'

'Really,' remarked Steinegge quietly; 'very good, very good indeed! How the woman hits the nail on the head. A witch. This is becoming amusing.'

'It isn't Malombra, it's Crusnelli.'

'Malombra!'

'Crusnelli!'

'Malombra!'

The argument waxed warm, and they all shouted at the same time.

'Let us be going,' said Silla.

They got up and turned back down the hill towards the castle. When they had reached the back part of the courtyard, where it was so dark that Steinegge began to regret not having brought a lantern, the soft clear notes of a piano broke the silence of the night. The darkness seemed to lift beneath the spell. Not that in fact they could see ought; but they felt the great mountain walls encircling those ringing notes, while beneath them lay outstretched the whispering waters of the lake. In that isolated place the effect was indescribable, full of mystery, exciting the imagination. The piano may have been an old, worn-out instrument, and in a city, and by daylight, its feeble and plaintive voice might have excited derision;

yet in the solitude and the darkness it seemed full of expression and of feeling. Its voice seemed weary, worn out by too ardent a spirit. The melody, all fire and passion, was supported by a light graceful accompaniment, half-caressing, half-jesting.

'Donna Marina,' said Steinegge.

'Ah!' whispered Silla, 'what is she playing?'

'Well,' replied Steinegge, 'I should say it is out of "Don Giovanni." You know *Vieni alla finestra.* She plays almost every evening about this time.'

Meanwhile the light in the library had disappeared.

'The Count has gone to bed in disgust,' explained Steinegge.

'Why?'

'Because he hates music, and she plays on purpose.'

'Hush,' whispered Silla, and then added: 'How beautifully she plays.'

'She plays,' declared Steinegge, 'like an evil spirit with amorous propensities. I counsel you, my dear sir, to place no trust in her music.'

CHAPTER IV

CECILIA

'*From* Donna Marina Crusnelli di Malombra *to* the Signora Giulia de Bella.

'*28th August* 1864.

'A most graceful toilette. But how came you to light upon so poor an idea as the *myosotis*? Do not forget me on the right; do not forget me on the left; do not forget me, ladies and gentlemen. Perhaps one blossom fell on the sloping shoulders of dear Mr D——; another may have caught fire in the r d whiskers of Count B——; while the tall, gawky son of the house picked up a third and hid it carefully in his Latin grammar. Heavens! if there had been none left for your husband! When I give a fancy-dress ball, you will see how I shall go!

'Send me a tiny bottle of *egnatia*. My nerves are out of tune like a boarding-school piano. It is midnight and we cannot sleep, neither I nor the lake, who is murmuring about it down below. The *Dart*' is there too, rattling her chains, and anxious to be off and to take me with her. A nice idea! A cold shudder would go through you and the gallants to whom you are now offering tea and cigarettes, if you could see me wandering over the waves, alone in my skiff, like a wild woman of the

woods. Never mind, I will sacrifice for your sake the *Dart's* wishes and my own; for if I had not to write to you, I should certainly go for a sail.

'Now tell me why it is that my uncle's ink never dries. Tell me why, in September, the castle is to be visited by my cousin, the Countess Fosca Salvador, and His Excellency Nepomoceno, commonly called Nepo, son of the aforesaid.

'Yes, I am thinking about it. And why not? Why should I not marry Signor Nepo and go far away and forget even the name of this odious prison-house? The Salvadors have a palace at Venice, in style half Byzantine, half Lombard, in colour brick-red, and standing in the middle of some greenish water between two deserted evil-smelling canals, all beauty and squalor. A touch of the East, a Canaletto, a living Guardi, in which one would gladly pass two months in each year; though not with the old Countess, who is an old windbag, full of trite and scandalous chatter. Of Nepo I know but little. I only saw him once, at Milan. He has a well-satisfied air, and a soft, smooth way of talking which reminded me of whipped cream. They said that he was making a profound study of political economy, and that, in anticipation of the liberation of Venice, he was paving the way towards his election as deputy for the district in which he has his estates and his rice-fields. This made G——, who can't bear him, call him a lobby-man. Countess Fosca, whom I have heard speak of my uncle with expressions of horror, has announced this visit of hers in two letters—one for my uncle, one for me, both couched in terms of the tenderest affection.

'Another item of news for you—we have a Black Prince staying at the castle. I will tell you about him; it is a theme which may coax sleep to visit me, and

check my pen, which is darting hither and thither like a tarantula's tongue.

Black, in the first place; yes, he is very black, except, perhaps, at the elbows of his coat. Prince—no, by no means. He is, in appearance, a commonplace *bourgeois*. I call him the Black Prince because he cultivates the reserved demeanour of a mysterious personage. And now for the romance. Oh, yes, there is a romance. You must know that my uncle, in his liberality, has given me as boatman the son of the gardener, an impudent page thirteen years old. Partly from him, partly from my maid, partly from the walls, which are full of them, I have gathered the rumours that follow in the train of this gentleman. He is said to be the son of an old flame of my uncle's, who died years ago at Milan in misery; and the Count has summoned him hither to arrange, little by little, a marriage in the family,

'You understand, my dear Giulia, the stern old anchorite is believed to have had his Capua. I, dear, have never yet met the man worthy to be loved by me, but I love Love, and the books and the music that speak of it; I am not going to have my life guided by a libertine who has become good in the wilderness. As regards the danger, which I may be said to run, of soiling my hands by touching this rather soiled linen, as you know, it is a danger for them, not for me.

'He arrived at the castle a fortnight ago, early in August, in the dead of night, like a contraband package. The following day I had a great scene with my uncle, who imagines that he possesses powers of life and death over my French authors if they happen to leave my apartments. So he took up my *De Musset*, whom I

had left in front of my beloved Canaletto, and, like the bear he is, flung it out of the window. On that day I caught sight, at a distance, of the Black Prince; but I did not go down to dinner, although my uncle came and begged me to do so, with the benign manner which he always assumes after indulging in one of his passionate outbursts. Next day the gentleman departed, but returned on the 18th with arms and baggage-train, and definitely went into camp here. You will understand that, during these ten days, I have occasionally come into contact with him.

'Well, dear, I believe the story that is going about; but my uncle knows me, and treats me diplomatically. He has never mentioned his visitor, either before or since his arrival. Indeed, our relations are such that all the world might come to the castle and leave it without his mentioning the matter to me. He keeps his young man shut up nearly all day in the library. At meals they talk of nothing but books. In fact, anybody not behind the scenes would say he wanted him to marry Signor Steinegge and not me, for he makes them work in the same room, and sends them to take walks together every day after dinner, even when it rains. The two gentlemen seem quite taken with one another—a kind of love at first sight. I think I have already told you about the horrid man who spends his time translating German for my uncle? *Les deux font le paire.* In the early days the creature wished to act the fine gentleman and the wit, but I speedily put him in his proper place; and now I have done the same for his friend, who, the day after he had been presented to me, forgot himself to the extent of offering me his hand. As a matter of fact, he remembered himself while the hand was in mid-air, and

pulled it back before he had actually extended it for me to take; but he was on the point of doing so. It was not a vulgar kind of hand, I noticed, but resembled my uncle's, who has the hands of the Ormengos. After this rebuff, his bearing has been unexceptionable, even haughty; I must give him his due to this extent. You must remember that I made an impression on him without any fault of mine. I knew it from the moment we met, and can the more readily admit the fact in that it is so little flattering to my self-esteem. I am not constituted like yourself, my dear Giulia, who, for five minutes, would flirt with a commercial traveller. Admit that you would! The Black Prince, for your information, is about thirty years old, is not good-looking, and yet one cannot call him plain; his eyes are not wanting in intelligence, and my maid might possibly think him nice. I cannot bear the sight of him; to me he is objectionable, odious. I assure you that no fear of risking my interest under my uncle's will will induce me to abase myself to think of this man. I do not even understand such things. There is an end of it.

'How do I spend my time? Always the same life. I read, play the piano, write, walk, go for a sail, and, latterly, I have taken to fighting *ennui* with pistols. Literally; you remember the beautiful saloon pistols which poor papa gave to Miss Sarah and me? Well, after four years I suddenly remembered that mine were here, and now I make practice on the statues in the garden, especially on a rather grimy Flora, which would be an excellent likeness of the instructress of my youth, if only I could give her a pock-marked face. Then I have amusements which rank as "extras." For example, some fine evening I intend to go to the

nightly *rendezvous*, which the silly old country doctor is trying to obtain from Fanny. I hasten to add that I am waiting for the full moon.

'Oh! and the mysterious correspondence? Cut short, my dear. Terminated by the last letter which you forwarded to me from "Lorenzo." So in future you need do no further violence to your feelings, and need forward no more letters from the *poste restante*, at anyrate not on my account. He desired, it would seem, a platonic passion, a tie of the philosphic-sentimental kind, *à l'allemand*. Just fancy! my flippant tone offended him, and he broke off the correspondence with a long tirade full of fire and pride, with certain sarcastic touches that send a shiver down one's spine. He does me the honour to attribute to me a certain amount of wit. Then follows a sarcasm. What is wit? A cold, meaningless, empty gleam of waters bathed in moonlight. Now I ask you—If the shining waters are the wit, what is the moonlight? The moon, too, is cold and empty, but not meaningless. She is real and solid. Does the flash of wit come from some cold light of abstract truth, from some lofty and desolate negation? In that case I detest it, as I detest this pedant Lorenzo, because I have my own faith, and one very different from what I believed in when we were at the last mass in San Giovanni. There is nobody now who can say to me, *Mademoiselle*. Ah! Giulia, if you only knew what torments I endure these sleepless nights, and what is in my heart. But neither you nor anyone else will ever know.

'Forgive me if I leave you for a moment. I have been to listen to the murmuring of the waves, and now return to you. Fortunately the waves' voice is monotonous, they keep on repeating themselves. One would think they were saying prayers. Sleep is stealing over me; is

coming with the distant shadows of the Countess Fosca and Count Nepo, and their trunks. Farewell, *myosotis*.

'MARINA.'

After writing this characteristic letter Donna Marina got up and went to look at herself in the glass. From the ample folds of her white wrapper rose up, as from a cloud, a fine graceful neck, and amid two masses of auburn hair a small, delicate face, the face of a young, capricious child, with two large piercing eyes, eyes made for empire and for love. Her face, neck and bosom, which was just visible through the white folds, all had the same rich white hue. She glanced at herself for a moment, shook her head, throwing back the two masses of hair upon her shoulders, and who knows how many troubled thoughts behind her, and placed the candle on the little table near her bed, striking the silver hard upon the marble, as though to defy the solitude and silence.

And now, pursued in her dreams by some wearing anxiety, she sleeps tossing about uneasily beneath her coverlet. While all the other inmates of the castle are asleep too, let us talk in whispers of Donna Marina and of the thoughts that are in her heart.

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE STORY

SHE was the only child of a sister of Count Caesar's, and of the Marquis Filippo Crusnelli di Malombra, a Lombardy nobleman who lived in Paris between 1849 and 1859, squandering there a rich dower that had been realised in a frantic hurry after Novara. Marina had lost her mother during their stay in Paris, and passed from the hands of a severe Belgian governess into those of an English lady, young, good-looking and vivacious. When the Marquis returned to Milan in 1859 Marina was eighteen, her head full of romantic ideas, which filled her instructress with amazement, and a sarcastic smile upon her lips which gained her few friends.

In the winter of 1859-60, during which he established at Milan a splendid reputation for hospitality, the reckless Marquis decided to return from Paris and to re-enter Milanese society with the dash of a mail-coach rattling through a quiet market town. He gave dinners, balls and suppers, Miss Sarah doing the honours of the house. A few old ladies, relatives of the Marquis, protested seriously with 'dear Philip,' doing so with the air of persons discharging a lofty duty and expressing at the same time the opinion of a venerable caste. Their arguments fell upon deaf ears; diplomatic relations were broken off, and his relatives would have no more to do

with 'poor Philip.' So they used to tell their friends, and their friends humoured them by talking scandal, in deference to their views, of the Marquis, Miss Sarah and Marina, above all of Miss Sarah. Nay, these people even brought the newest and choicest bits of scandal and offered them, wrapped in honeyed phrases, to the anxious relatives. X. and Y. have refused the Marquis's invitations, other letters of the alphabet have accepted, but they treat Miss Sarah with marked coldness. Lady R. made her feel clearly what she thought of her. It is said that the governess will soon accompany Philip back to Paris; with his French army of attendants, perhaps. Stupid jests, made over cigars and whisky and soda, are in circulation. Miss Sarah is going with the cavalry, Donna Marina with the artillery, and Philip—poor Philip!—with the infantry.

Why with the infantry?

Because he begins to see trouble ahead in his affairs, rocks and a whirlpool in front of him. The grand *suite* is a burden to him; he puts up with it because Sarah wishes it, she not knowing the true state of affairs. She is anxious to get Marina off her father's hands, and then to make the *grand coup* herself. Young Ratti was trotted out, but his father, on information received from Paris, sent him off to Constantinople. Hereupon that miserable punster R. remarked that if the rats leave the house it is a sign that the house of Crusnelli is tottering to a fall.

All these things were duly related to the old ladies, tongues were set wagging in Milan about the financial affairs of the Marquis, but the voices were timid, vague, and found little credence. For the most part they were true; but heaven knows how much champagne would still have flowed in honour of Donna Marina if an

aneurism had not carried off her father, and with him the champagne and Miss Sarah.

Count Caesar d'Ormengo was summoned to the family council on behalf of Marina. The council was in time to save the honour of the family name and a small remnant of the property. The Count and the defunct Marquis had never been friends, and for some years had ceased to meet. But the Count was Marina's nearest relation, and, of all the family, he alone offered her a home. Marina would have refused the offer if she could have done so. The appearance, habits, and stern speech of her uncle roused her dislike; but the friends of the days of prosperity had disappeared; her father's relations showed her a certain grave sympathy, with an undefined undercurrent of rebuke, which she observed and indignantly resented. Only, she had not an independent fortune; so she accepted the Count's offer. She accepted it coldly without a word of gratitude, as though Count Caesar, her mother's brother, did but fulfil a duty, and in so doing obtained the advantage of a companion in his dreary solitude. Marina had never been there, but she had often heard her father speak of the 'bear's den,' which the bear had abandoned in 1831, returning to it twenty-eight years later in 1859. Not that she was afraid of the prospect of living there; on the contrary, she rather liked the idea of the castle buried among the mountains, where she would dwell like a banished queen who prepares, in the shade and silence of the forest, to regain her throne. The danger of being buried alive for ever did not even occur to her, for she had a blind and complete faith in fate; and, feeling that she had been born to enjoy the splendours of life, she was disposed to wait her return to them in haughty indolence.

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She arrived at the castle with her uncle one stormy evening. The Count himself led the way to the rooms set apart for her in the east wing, looking towards the mountains. He had caused them to be simply but comfortably furnished, and had had fires lighted in all the rooms. In his niece's bedroom he had placed a portrait of his sister by Hayez. Marina followed him quietly, looking in silence at the walls, the ceiling, the furniture and the portrait, listening to her uncle's remarks on this, that and the other; she threw open a window, and remarked quietly that she wished for a room above the lake.

Her temperament caused her to wish for the murmuring of the water and the howling of the wind, and she was by no means abashed by the Count's lowering brow and flashing eyes. She remained unmoved beneath his sarcasms, which he suddenly cut short, rather to her surprise, by a curt 'As you wish.' The Count went out, giving an order in a low voice to his old housekeeper, Giovanna. The housekeeper led the way, candle in hand, followed by a lugubrious train of servants carrying luggage. Marina brought up the procession with Fanny, her maid. They had to pass from one end of the castle to the other. As they went out of one room into another, Marina would turn round to gaze into the darkness, constraining the entire procession to come to a halt. Everyone's gaze was turned towards her; the old housekeeper looked very grave, the servants half-confused, half-frightened.

When they had entered the loggia which joins the two wings of the castle, Marina stepped up to the balcony facing the lake, cast a glance towards the gloomy hillside opposite the east wing, raised her eyebrows and turned to the housekeeper.

'Where are you taking me to?' she asked. Immediately all the servants put down the baggage they were carrying.

The old housekeeper placed her candle on one of the boxes, wrung her hands, and shaking her head, whispered,—

'To a very uncanny place, my beautiful young lady.'

'Then I shall not go there.'

'It would be better not to go,' exclaimed one of the servants.

'All very well for you to talk,' rejoined the old housekeeper in severe tones. 'And how about my master? God be merciful to us.'

'What is it you mean?' asked Marina, impatiently. 'Is my room a granary, or a cupboard, or at the bottom of a well?'

'Oh! the room's all right enough.'

'Then what is it?'

'What is it?' intervened the first speaker, an old half-educated peasant. 'Excuse me if I join in your conversation—the devil is in it. I trust that I make myself clear.'

'Be quiet. Hold your tongue. What have you to do with the matter? Be prudent.'

'Prudent! You're right there, Giovanna. Prudence teaches us that we should not go into those rooms.'

'Forwards,' said Marina. 'The Count's orders must be obeyed.' And she stepped forward with Giovanna. Entering a long corridor they at last reached a staircase on the left, and going up it came into another passage in the storey above.

When Giovanna threw open the dreaded door, Marina snatched the candle from her and rapidly entered the room. It was a good-sized room, very lofty, with a brick

floor, the walls gruesomely draped with ragged yellow hangings, the ceiling semi-vaulted, with a fresco in the centre. There was a huge four-poster, whose tester looked like some old nobleman's coronet that had lost its way. A few antique chairs, faithful companions of fallen grandeur, completed the furniture of the apartment. Marina had all the windows flung open, and sat down on one of the window-seats, looking out into the darkness and revelling in the fresh breezes, listening to the mingled murmurs of the waters and the woods. To her they seemed voices of reprimand and menace, friendly to her angry uncle, inspired by a higher and a malignant power.

Marina sat there long, fascinated, and without noticing the feverish bustling hither and thither, the broken ejaculations of the servants who, behind her, were putting the room in order and bringing in linen and furniture. Often during the past years Marina had seen vague visions of solitary wildernesses, on which her thoughts rested, and passed on without either desire or disgust. Now those visions recurred to her. She recalled something that reminded her of this black solitude. At the Scala? Yes, one night at a masked ball at the Scala; another night, in her own home, as she was going to bed after a grand reception, there flashed across her brain a dark vision of solitary mountain-passes. She had paid no heed to these phantoms. And now she was face to face with the reality.

'Signora,' said Giovanna, timidly.

Marina did not reply.

'Signora.'

Silence.

'Signora Donna Marina.'

The latter started and turned round sharply; only the

housekeeper was in the room, the others had gone away.

'Well?'

'I hope your ladyship will put up with things as they are for to-night. To-morrow let us hope that his lordship will change his mind. If not, we will try to make the room more comfortable. Can I get you anything, my lady?'

'Certainly.'

Having given this laconic answer, Marina left the good old woman standing where she was, open-mouthed, took two or three strides down the room, and then turned back to her again.

'This devil of whom they speak—where is the devil?'

'Ah! the Madonna guard us! I do not know. They talk like that, your ladyship. I do not know.'

'What do they say?'

'Oh, don't be afraid.'

'What do they say?'

'They say that in these rooms there is the spirit of a poor gentleman who died years ago—the father of his lordship, and therefore your ladyship's grandfather.'

Marina laughed.

'So my uncle is the son of a devil.'

'Ah, my lady, do not talk in that way. His lordship's father was no devil, though he may have been just a little bit related to one. You must know that he kept the Countess shut up here, as if in prison—not the Count's mother, the first wife, a Genoese lady much younger than the old Count. There was an old man living at R—— who remembered seeing her, and said she was so lovely that her face was as delicate as a child's. Well, this poor lady went mad, and at night she would write poetry, and sing for hours together, always the same air,

and the fishermen at R——, when, they went out in their boats at night, could hear her a mile away. Yes, and the windows had to be fitted with iron bars. I remember when they were pulled down, for I was born at the castle.

'Soon the poor lady passed away from this world, and when, years afterwards, his lordship, your grandfather, died too, the people began to say that strange sounds were heard, and that they used to come from this room. And they said that the spirit of the lady's husband had been condemned, as a punishment for having been so wicked, to pass seventy-seven times as many years in this room as he had kept his poor wife shut up here. To this day there is not a peasant for miles round who would sleep a night here if you were to give him a million francs.'

'A silly story,' murmured Marina. 'What is there in the room beneath?'

'A bed which used to belong to this lady, your grandmother. No one has used it since.'

'And above?'

'The apple loft.'

'And that window there, what does it look out on?'

'It looks out on to the lake, for here we are at the corner of the castle.'

'And that door there?'

'That leads to a big room like this, facing the same way, where your ladyship's maid can sleep.'

At this point an outburst of weeping and lamentation was heard in the neighbouring passage. It was Fanny, who was standing with her back against the wall, sobbing bitterly. Between the sobs she repeated that she wished to go away, to return to Milan at once.

Giovanna was amazed at the patience, kindness and

tact which Marina lavished on her wayward handmaiden, who had completely lost her head, and to whom she little by little restored her self-control without getting from her a single direct reply. She wanted, she said, to go to Milan, to her own home; she had no house there, she knew, but she would go to somebody else's house. At Milan there were at least fifty houses where carriages were kept, where she would be as welcome as manna from heaven, and before she left Milan splendid offers had been made her. Such a place as this she had never dreamt of, and all the gold in the world would not induce her to stay longer than a week; the idea of sleeping in that dreadful room had made her go out of her mind. Her wages and perquisites were good enough, but all the perquisites in the world would not make her stay beyond a fortnight or a month, even in another room. Wages were of no importance to her; if she did stay it would be out of attachment to her mistress, and not for an increase in her salary; and, moreover, she was feeling far from well, and felt a great need of a substantial meal and of something cheering to help it down. So peace was made, Giovanna being instructed to find Fanny a bedroom farther away from the ghost's chamber, and Marina took possession of her own apartment.

Even her stern uncle was at last won over by Marina; there were no humble excuses and no caresses, both he and she were above such weaknesses, but the old Count broke through the ice with studied politeness, and a few little attentions, slight in themselves, but sufficient to remove the barrier between them. At first, Marina's impetuous bearing puzzled him and roused his distrust; and her strange behaviour on the stormy evening when she arrived was to him an inexplicable enigma. He then offered her a more cheerful room in the left wing of

the castle, but Marina refused it; she liked the fearsome legend narrated to her by Giovanna. The very solitude and sadness of the old castle assumed, within the four walls of her chamber, a fantastic and pathetic shape, and she observed that the eyes of the servants and peasants on the estate followed her with admiration mingled with dread. She had obtained the Count's permission—and the feat appeared to Giovanna to surely savour of witchcraft—to arrange her own room from top to bottom in accordance with her own tastes. She tore down the ragged old yellow hangings and replaced them by beautiful tapestries which the Count had stored away in a granary, deeming them of no account whatever. Over the brick floor she laid down a light wooden flooring with a bright check pattern, and over this she flung a tapestry carpet from the foot of the bed to a table covered with maroon velvet. The old coroneted bedstead remained, but its court of antique chairs was summarily banished. A gallant company of dames and cavaliers of the old *régime*, all fine airs and mincing smiles, last unsold relic of the splendours of the house of Crusnelli, came from Milan, and spread their peacock feathers before the surly monarch.

When the delicate face and figure of Marina passed through the midst of these elegant antiquities, in the bright blue dress and long train which she sometimes wore, from caprice, in her own rooms, she looked as though she had descended from the fresco on the ceiling, from that clear sky through which an Aurora and her gay train danced with the Naïads; fallen, as it were, into a dark, subterranean realm, where her youth and beauty still shone indeed, but with diminished splendour. The goddess above her, rosy from sole to crown, had not, like her young prototype, the flashing fire of life and thought

within her eyes, and although she walked the sky with all the symbols of divinity, yet she appeared, in comparison with Marina, but a glorified cook.

In the next room, which had inspired such terror in poor Fanny, Marina placed her Erard, a souvenir of her stay in Paris, and her books, a collection, be it said, of every kind of plant, and with more poisonous than health-giving specimens among them.

English authors were represented by Shakespeare and Byron in magnificent illustrated editions, the gift of her father, by Poe, and all the novels of Disraeli, her favourite author. Not a single German book was there, and the sole Italian one was a *Monograph History of the Crusnelli Family*, published at Milan on the occasion of her father's marriage. The origin of the family was traced to a Signor de Kerosnel who came to Italy in the train of the first wife of Giovan Galeazzo Visconti, Isabella of France, Countess of Vertu. There was a copy of Dante, but in the French garb given him by the Abbé Lamennais, which rendered him much more pleasing to Marina. She had all George Sand's novels, many of Balzac's, all De Musset's works, all Stendhal's; Baudelaire's *Fleur du Mal;* Chateaubriand's *Réné;* many volumes of the *Chefs d'œuvres des Littératures Étrangères*, and the *Chefs d'œuvres des Littératures anciennes* published by Hachette. She had made her selection in a spirit of research, paying little heed to obvious dangers. Bound volumes of the *Révue des Deux Mondes* completed her library.

The great family row-boat had to keep close to the side of the boat-house in order to make way for the *Dart*, a graceful skiff from the Lago di Como, which looked like a young lady attending a dancing class, accompanied by her mamma. Signor Enrico, commonly

called Rico, the son of the gardener, became Admiral of the Fleet. At first he nourished hopes of a uniform worthy of his rank, and in this he was supported by Marina, but upon this point the old Count, an aristocrat full of contradictory prejudices, was hopelessly opposed to them. He declared, that for the honour of the human race he would rather see Rico without shoes and stockings than masquerading about in a livery, even though it should be a boatman's uniform. When one day Rico, waxing bold, ventured to remark that at Como and at Lecco he had seen many boys of his own class very much at ease in their blue jackets, the only reply vouchsafed to him was that he was an egregious ass. Marina hereupon arrayed him in a dark, well-cut suit, which the conceited Rico put on, growing red as a crawfish with delight, and smiling all over. Even the old gardener seemed to renew his youth and his more courtly graces with the advent of Marina. New flowers appeared in the beds, the gravel paths were bright and free from weeds. Flowers and foliage plants were planted in homage to the young marchioness, in the middle of the large flower-bed between the greenhouse and the drive beside the lake. The gardener and the rest of the servants regarded Marina as the rising sun, and there was a brisk competition among them to obtain her favour. Giovanna stood apart; Giovanna looked not so far ahead; she had neither hopes nor fears. Devoted to her master, respectful to the 'Signora Donna Marina,' she pursued her way in peace.

It cannot be said that the Count was brightened up, as parts of his castle were, or that he blossomed out afresh, as did his garden. But even he reflected a touch of new brightness, for youth and beauty and grace, united in one person, irradiate *nolens volens* their immediate

surroundings. The Count shaved more regularly, and his grey locks looked less unkempt.

Steinegge's demeanour towards Marina was cold and reserved. This curious secretary, who could hardly write three words of Italian without a mistake, had arrived at the castle a month before her. The Count had engaged his services, on the recommendation of the Marquis di Crema, for translations from German and English, a language which Steinegge knew perfectly, his mother being an English governess. On Marina's arrival the poor man had considered it his duty to ply her with attentions and endeavour to amuse her. The disappointments and the sufferings of his life had not sufficed to destroy the courtly traditions of his youth. As an officer he had fought bravely; he was a fine horseman, and an expert fencer. Was it possible for his bearing towards Marina to be that of a silly secretary? He laid himself out to bombard her with stately compliments and antiquated gallantries; he quoted Schiller, and he quoted Goethe. His efforts were not crowned with any brilliant success. The only notice which Marina deigned to take of the secretary was to indicate by a glance, or an ironical remark, how lightly she esteemed his politeness, his attempts at wit, his aged and dried-up person. In a word, that because it pleased her to be agreeable to the Count, that she would not, therefore, necessarily make herself so to all. In spite of all that the Count might say in his secretary's praise, she persisted in regarding him as a vulgar adventurer. During her sojourn in Paris she had seen not a few of these weather-beaten faces, and the type did not in the least appeal to her. In addition to this, she simply detested everything connected with Germany; the language, the mode of thought, the ideals of love, the music, people, country, its very

name. She used to say she imagined Germany to be one big tobacco pipe, a huge, broken meerschaum head, with the face of a fat *bourgeois*, and in place of brain a mass of damp, smoking tobacco. From this unwholesome mass issue dense clouds of smoke, thin blue spirals, changing from the grotesque to the sentimental, little clouds that become big clouds and finally overwhelm you and stifle you in their fumes. One day while Steinegge was talking to her with great eloquence of German ideals of Woman, of Marguerite and Charlotte, Marina replied, with cold, aristocratic indifference,—'Do you know how the Germans strike me?'—and then she related the above kindly little parable. While she was doing so, Steinegge's sallow face flushed crimson up to the roots of his hair, and his eyes flashed fire. When Marina had finished, he said,—'Signora Marchesina, this old brown pipe has given out fire before now, and will do so again; in the meantime, I would strongly advise you not to touch it, for it burns one's fingers.' From that day Steinegge had kept to himself his compliments and his poetic quotations.

Marina had her own objects in view; to wit, to win over her uncle, establish her influence, and get herself taken away, at least for a month or two, to Paris, or Turin, or Naples, or some other centre of life and fashion outside Milan. To rub along with this much, and leave the rest to luck. She had formed this plan the very evening of her arrival, after measuring swords with the Count and seeing of what metal he was made. There was a struggle, before she decided on this course, with her own haughty soul, which revolted from all hypocrisy, although it was sick unto death from dejection and *ennui*. Having repaired the effects of the painful scene of the first evening by a calm and dignified bearing, she

began to praise, one after the other, the castle, the garden, the noble cypresses, the lake, the mountains, the estate, like a person who settles down in a new abode and adapts herself kindly to new habits and new surroundings. One by one she dropped her immense circle of correspondents; and the Count no longer raised his eyebrows at the heaps of monogrammed, crested, scented letters which Rico brought up from the post-office in the early days. The sarcasms which occasionally escaped him in those days in regard to Marina's lady friends and correspondents, the sharer in her past follies, very nearly upset her plans for the future; for replies rose to her lips which would have swept away at one breath the patient labour of months. Her beloved French authors, novelists and poets, only left her room by stealth and when the Count could not see them. He had a fierce contempt for everything French except the wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy. A republican of the old school, he used to say that the French make love to noble ideas, and ruin them and cast them on one side. He detested them as inventors of the formula, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, where the second phrase, he would say, lay in wait behind the first to stab it in the dark. And, since he did not measure words in expressing either contempt or respect, he declared that all the French writers put together were not worth old Giovanna's washing bill; that Voltaire was an unbridled buffoon, and that Thiers with his tactics was a foolish rhetorician like Phormio, and would be insulted by Napoleon, could he return, as the former was by Hannibal. When he spoke of Lamartine, 'this jangling guitar, the plaything of a republic in its decadence,' certain rough, vigorous Piedmontese phrases that slumbered half-forgotten in his memory rose to his mind and gave forcible expression to his disdain.

At such times he would denounce the democracy of France, and their novelists and their poets, for he detested modern poetry and fiction in whatever language. 'Society is sick,' he used to say, 'and these imbeciles of literary men only put it under ether.' So Marina did not let him see her books, but on the other hand she had frequent and open-hearted conversations with him on the subject of religion.

The old Count's religious views were peculiar to himself; they were, perhaps, wanting in logic, but were clear and strong, like all his other opinions. Believing in God and the immortality of the soul, he started from the text, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men,' and separated affairs heavenly from affairs worldly, or, as he would express it, effected the decentralisation of religion. 'Remember,' he once observed to an over-zealous Catholic, 'remember that the Almighty marked the birthday of His Son by bestowing a religious constitution on mankind.' And then, to demonstrate that God reigns in glory in heaven but does not rule on earth, he coolly cited Lucretius as though he had been an editor of the *Civiltà Cattolica*. He then affirmed, by way of conclusion, that mankind is free to live following such ideals as each man is able to form for himself.

Marina's views were not so clear and precise. She had observed the Catholic ritual by instinct, by force of the vigorous beliefs nourished by generations of ancestors. Such cold formalities had long been sufficient to make her believe herself a Catholic. They sufficed also to make the revolution which much reading had effected in her attitude towards belief appear to her something glorious and full of life, in comparison with the sterile formalism she had hitherto practised. Her new faith

seemed to her like the bursting of winter's bonds by the buds and flowers of spring. In her new home she resolutely avoided all outward forms of worship. Her uncle, she observed, did the same; and she was curious to learn his reasons, with a view to being confirmed in her modern agnostic attitude. But the Count did not afford her much comfort; he regarded religion from the historic rather than the philosophic point of view. He had become sceptical from observing the ills which flow from the war of faiths, and the fact that their evolution is regular, and controlled by a general law of development and decadence. He did not care to advertise his scepticism. He even went so far as to tell Marina that perhaps no great harm would be done if all women went to mass. She replied that, from this time forth, if she went to mass she would also wish to be able to join in the prayers; but that active hypocrisy was the monopoly of the men.

To her a religious democracy was as repugnant as a political democracy was to her uncle. She was not by nature irreligious. But she did think that there ought to be a special kind of religion for the aristocracy, a freer religion, without formulas, without, she almost thought, moral sanctions, or, at least, with moral laws adaptable according to circumstances. A religion in which for the ideas of good and evil were substituted the less vulgar ideas of beautiful and ugly, of good and bad taste. A refined appreciation of beauty and of harmony would take the place of a sense of moral rectitude, or conscience; the senses would not be fought against, but controlled by reason and the æsthetic feeling. A god! Yes. In the world of new youth and beauty beyond the grave.

The Count detested music, and Marina knew better

than gs of which he heard speak. He was a regular did n terbox; whether he was playing, working, or eating, expre as always talking and always laughing, save only thoug in the presence of the Count, when he took refuge she di nce. He knew all the gossip of the countryside, only the ssessed an inexhaustible store of tales and local of the . Marina would often inquire of him touching quicker ies about the Mad Lady of the Castle. He strange fi hem with a thousand variations, weaving into herself cou own capricious and poetical fancies, especially ing-room a al catastrophe. One day the heroine of the il Vecchio. k French leave and disappeared, going straight the roguish, bode of the Evil One. Another day, her above the ri her flung down into the Acquafonda in cussions on ai as the country people called a deserted spirit; nay, a lo e mountains facing the castle; Marina glance as Marina r er last remaining estate in fee simple. the old man was e of the youthful novelist was, how- listened in silence. py prisoner issued forth from her

Yet, in spite of the circled with a ray of moonlight, uncle regarded her, Mar ir.

this austere man, who des in these narratives, and in the of all kinds, and who had im etailed to her with an extra- of concealing, at least in part, nd ingenuity. She had had nothing of the hypocrite in h here was as yet no talk times upon the point of bursting out w to suffer in conse- she could not bear the Count, and did eed, but of fre- having to owe him either gratitude or respec felt. She ence. But she held her peace. She checked the r the outbreak with an effort, unchained the *Dart*, and went off, sometimes alone, sometimes with Rico, tied up her boat alongside some lonely bank, and started off up the mountainside at a pace, and with an energy, of which one would have hardly thought her slight frame was capable.

seemed to her like the bursting of winter's bonds by haze-buds and flowers of spring. In her new home her, resolutely avoided all outward forms of worship. mong uncle, she observed, did the same; and she was c evil to learn his reasons, with a view to being confirm been her modern agnostic attitude. But the Count ubtless afford her much comfort; he regarded religion f Castle' historic rather than the philosophic point of vi had become sceptical from observing the ills vlent exer- from the war of faiths, and the fact that their the *Dart* is regular, and controlled by a general law ith Rico's ment and decadence. He did not care to ing gentle- scepticism. He even went so far as to tel ring copses, perhaps no great harm would be done if al or traps for to mass. She replied that, from this ti the mischiev- went to mass she would also wish to d. the prayers; but that active hypocrisy He came to the of the men , in a fight, and at

To her a religious democracy enthusiasm all the political democracy was to her ong them the *Guerrin* nature irreligious. But she did f a boy's library. He be a special kind of religion edit the functions of parish religion, without formulas, ast that he could chant his moral sanctions, or, at ur the curate,' and he held his according to circumst along in his white surplice before ideas of good and unwashed urchins collected at the ideas of beauti the high altar. To his patrons he was refined ched. He used to say that he loved, first, tak then the 'gentry at the castle,' then his mother, hen his father, then the schoolmistress, then the curate. For him, there were no other gentry in the world than the Count and Marina. He spoke of them always as though his interests were bound up with theirs, contrast- ing 'our castle,' 'our garden,' our boat' with the other

things of which he heard speak. He was a regular chatterbox; whether he was playing, working, or eating, he was always talking and always laughing, save only when in the presence of the Count, when he took refuge in silence. He knew all the gossip of the countryside, and possessed an inexhaustible store of tales and local legends. Marina would often inquire of him touching the stories about the Mad Lady of the Castle. He related them with a thousand variations, weaving into them his own capricious and poetical fancies, especially in the final catastrophe. One day the heroine of the tragedy took French leave and disappeared, going straight off to the abode of the Evil One. Another day, her husband had her flung down into the Acquafonda in Val Malombra, as the country people called a deserted gorge among the mountains facing the castle; Marina used to call it her last remaining estate in fee simple. The favourite finale of the youthful novelist was, however, this: the unhappy prisoner issued forth from her prison at midnight, encircled with a ray of moonlight, and dissolved into thin air.

Marina used to delight in these narratives, and in the local gossip which the boy retailed to her with an extraordinary mixture of malice and ingenuity. She had passed a year at the castle, and there was as yet no talk of any change. Her health began to suffer in consequence. Nervous attacks, not serious indeed, but of frequent occurrence, began to make themselves felt. She determined to make these serve her purpose; in the meanwhile, any distraction was welcome, even such as she derived from Rico's chatter.

Thus April of 1863 arrived, and with it, in the calm splendours of the sunset, an evening of ill-omen to Marina.

In the west, great masses of cloud were aglow in the setting sun, only divided from their reflections in the lake by the thin dark line of hills; the green hilltops opposite the castle were bright with sunlight, and so also were the inaccessible peaks of the Alpe dei Fiori. At their base, in the shadow, there was a dim soft light, a warmth from the sinking sun; along each little valley swept gusts of air perfumed with the scents of spring. Through the clear atmosphere rang merrily the bells of R——, where, outside the big black central door of the parish church, and between it and the vicarage, was assembled, on the east side of the lake, a slowly-moving stream of people. There was a confused movement among them, and a noise like that of a lot of fowls in a farmyard, or of young geese as they struggle through a newly-opened gate leading to their feeding grounds. The crowd pushed and shouted round the sellers of cakes and sweetmeats, pushed and shouted round the hawkers of trumpets and penny whistles, who were strolling hither and thither making music among the throng. Beneath the walnut trees, and among the great laurel bushes near the church, there was a noisy sound of eating and drinking. Somewhat apart from the crowd all the beauties of R—— and the neighbourhood were collected; mothers and daughters, smiling and elegantly attired; portly matrons in black silk with gold chains, gold earrings, gold hairpins; grave and modest maidens, whose hats and ribbons were calculated to turn any young man's head. The priests walked sedately amidst the crowd, with swelling chests, and red faces, their broad-flapped hats on the back of their heads, and cigars in their mouths. A crowd of naughty boys had slipped into the church by the belfry door and set to work to tug wildly at the ropes of the three bells, which now rang out like mad things, without measure or decorum;

until the sacristan fell upon the young scamps with reproof and ~~castigation~~. As they fled through the door in a bevy he dismissed them with one hearty, collective kick, and furiously banged to the door and locked it. Rico, who was standing hard by with his whistle between his lips, supported, I regret to say, the high-handed action of the ecclesiastical authorities, and rushed off in pursuit of the trespassers, shouting, 'Wait till I catch you! Wait till I catch you!' Nobody thought fit to wait for him, however, and he, rushing wildly forwards, butted a priest of a neighbouring village fair between the legs. The enraged ecclesaistic, calling him 'a confounded ass,' gave him a severe shaking, and a hearty cuff over the head to boot. Poor Rico retired crestfallen and went off to look at the band from V—— which, after playing in the most ravishing style in church, had now settled down at a table for a little refreshment. The boy, scenting something in the wind, soon discovered, from what he overheard, that in a short time there was to be a musical promenade on the lake. He at once formed the idea of asking his mistress whether she would like to go out in the *Dart* and see the spectacle. Running off swiftly as a hare, he leapt over the low wall between the vicarage and the park, and was quickly lost to view among the trees on his way to the castle.

Marina was walking that evening, in the garden along the stone balustrade above the lake, accompanied by a short man in a long dark overcoat with big feet and an awkward walk, who did not know what to do with his hands, and smiled at frequent intervals. It was the poor little doctor of R——, commonly known as the painter, from a weak habit he had of dying his beard. 'What a pity it is, doctor,' quoth Marina, leaning over the stonework and gazing at the sunset, 'what a pity it is that this

As for me, I cannot stand the crack-jaw terms, and I will wish you good morning.'

With these words Marina held out to the doctor a delicately perfumed hand, beautifully formed, almost transparent in its whiteness; she did this in such a way as to make him take it in silence, and then she turned towards the castle. Marina had a curious light in her eyes. She was well assured that the doctor would represent to the Count the necessity of taking her away for change of air, and that he would also mention her heroic self-sacrifice in declaring herself ready to face a whole legion of illnesses rather than demand sacrifices from her uncle. Upon this she based many hopes. She was on the point of going indoors when Rico appeared before her, all out of breath; and hurriedly placing before her his brilliant idea, received his answer, and dashed into the vestibule, reappeared laden with cushions and wraps, and away like lightning to the boathouse, slowly followed by Marina.

The evening was very pleasant and the little *Dart* glided smoothly over the clear water. Rico had recovered his breath, and the sharp, black prow seemed to fly through the waves. Every now and again the rower stopped to look towards the village of R——. The boats were not coming, but from afar one could hear bursts of music, now louder, now dying away. The band had doubtless halted on the market-place while the lads and lasses danced. Rico proposed to row towards land, but Marina ordered him to rest on his oars well away from the shore. He commenced a childish eulogy of the band, of the famous performer who had studied at Como, of the other prodigy who had played at Lecco, of their fine instruments. Donna Marina told him to be quiet. *He* be quiet? 'Now they're playing, they're coming; look there! No, they're not coming yet; now they're

going on board; ah! lights. They're lanterns; they're Chinese lanterns! Yes, now they're coming! Listen to the music, listen!'

'Row,' said Marina, 'towards the music.' The procession was headed by two boats, gaily lighted up, crammed full of musicians, all standing up, and playing, with cheeks puffed out to bursting point, on flutes, trumpets and clarionets all held out in line, and blaring forth in sudden bursts of sound. Then followed the ordinary boats full of pleasure-seekers. At the end of each tune a confused sound goes up from the latter, praise of the music, directions to the rowers, hints to the steersmen, shouts to this one and the other, cries in every note and every key. The flotilla advances slowly through the dark shadows of the lake, and passes in front of Marina.

The music changes to a pot-pourri of popular airs of Lombardy, and all the good folk in the boats feel their blood stirred with a warm glow of pride and passion. It is their loves, their joys, their transient happiness that are being sung, it is the music born of their own life which is ringing so nobly among their beloved hills. The musicians display an unwonted dash and fire, the oars come down with a heavy splash, the old boats leap forwards. All the company are singing together,—

'L'è sett' anni che son maridada
Perchè sera la bella biondin.'

Row hard, comrades! Even that old boatman there can remember the days when he was young, and he bends forward now over his oar with his old quavering voice,—

'Passeggiando per Milano
L'era un giorno ch'el pioveva
La mia bella la piangeva
Per vedermi andar soldà.'

Sing on, sing on, stout old waterman. Put into your song all the strength of your voice, all the fire of your heart. Have you not also felt, when you were young and handsome, two soft and loving arms about your neck?

Rico allowed himself to be carried away by the general enthusiasm, and, forgetful of his special duties, made his leathern lungs do double work, and rowed and sang simultaneously,—

'O che pena, oh che dolore
Che brutta bestia che l'è l'amore!'

There is not a breath of air stirring. On the wooded mountain sides every blade of grass, every fresh young leaf listens motionless to the distant strains of music; in the poplars on the meadows the nightingales hush their song; the big fish rise to the surface of the lake in astonishment at the glare of the torches and the lanterns; while the smooth, level surface of the lake heaves slightly beneath the shining tracks traced by the procession of boats. That evening the mountain air did not harm Marina. She would, perhaps, have preferred the Grand Canal at Venice, or an evening stroll at Bellagio, where the exquisite fragrance of the air is in itself an ecstasy. Yet the poetic charms of this April evening on the lake were not lost upon her, nor the simple beauty of the ballads which the people were singing. She was mindful, too, that, perhaps, in a short time she would have left lake and mountains behind her; the future was full of uncertain hopes, and she regarded the present in a not unkindly spirit. The music and the rustic scene before her struck Marina as being like to some rare delicacy, welcome,

just for once, to a refined and curious palate. In a similar spirit she would have admired a Flemish landscape or an air by Cimarosa.

As the music and singing slowly died away in the distance, and the *Dart* began to move towards the castle, the impression of that evening began gradually to sink into her mind, just then under the influence of the voluptuous languor of spring. But a strange sensation of dread was present also, resembling those passing fears which occasionally assail us and then vanish and we forget them; but which subsequent events proved to have been the winged messengers of impending disaster.

The village clock at R—— struck nine. The sound struck her as different from the usual one. How could this be? She listened again. Then it flashed across her that on a previous occasion she had been on the lake at exactly the same spot and the same hour, that she heard the clock strike and made a similar remark. But when?

It had often happened to her, especially in her girlhood, to be struck by similar reproductions of circumstances, by the recurrence of the same thought without being able to recall the original occasion. When she told her friends, her father shrugged his shoulders, and told her to pay no attention to such silly trifles. Miss Sarah had said 'Really?' Her girl friends assured her that the same things happened to them every day. So Marina kept her own council in future, but she pondered on the matter nevertheless.

These flashes of memory had reference to trifling occurrences. Thus she was in doubt whether they were true recollections or only hallucinations. This time she had no doubts. Thinking it over again

and again she was sure that she had never been on the lake at this hour. It was therefore an hallucination.

When she reached the castle the Count had already retired to rest. Marina paced for a few minutes up and down the loggia, then went to her rooms, where she took up a book, threw it away, took up another, laid that down, began to write a letter, then tore it up, and taking off her two rings she threw them on to the lid of the old-fashioned escritoire, which she used as a writing-table, and went to the piano. She played one of her favourite pieces, the great scene of the apparition of the nuns in 'Robert the Devil.' Opera music was the only kind which Marina ever played.

She played now as though the desires of the ghostly sinners had entered into her, only in greater strength. At the passage of the temptation she broke off, she could not go on. The internal fire within her was too strong for her, seemed to overwhelm her and choke her. She rested her head on the reading-desk, even that seemed to burn her. Marina jumped up and gazed out into the darkness. The noble music was still ringing through the air, she seemed to breathe it, to drink it in.

At length her glance fell on the floor at her feet, and chanced to light on a glistening object at which she now gazed almost unconsciously, it seemed to fascinate her. She stooped and picked it up. It was one of the rings she had thrown down on the escritoire. She looked for the other. It had disappeared from the lid where she had placed it. It was not in the desk, not on the floor. Marina began to be annoyed, and felt for it beneath the escritoire. It was not there. Thrusting her hand inside the desk, in a little space between two small drawers she came across a little

hollow, just big enough for her finger to enter, and there she felt her ring. Being unable to introduce more than one finger, she endeavoured to raise the ring by pressing it between her finger and the wood. To her astonishment it remained fixed where it was, appearing to be held down by a little hook.

While Marina was endeavouring to overcome this resistance, she suddenly heard the click of a spring, and the woodwork on which her hand was resting suddenly fell several inches lower. The ring fell with it, and Marina, in astonishment, hastily withdrew her hand, but then, feeling again, found that at the bottom of the secret drawer the hand entered into another receptacle containing various objects hidden away.

These she pulled out one by one. They were a prayer-book, a tiny mirror framed in silver, a lock of fair hair tied with a black silk ribbon, and a glove.

Marina in amazement examined and re-examined these under the light from the candle. The hai ecilia, very soft and fine like a child's; the glove was buttoned glove, very small and still retaining th y knows of the delicate hand that wore it; it looked l ted mirror thing, so well was it preserved. To whom o. I have relics belonged? What romance or hidden the mirror led to their being put away thus secretly? looks at her- felt in the mysterious cavity, hoping to fin y diamond script, but without success. Then she agai the objects she had found. It seemed to he nember it? one of them was longing to speak to her, to ng to you secrets. At last, as she turned and twisted y hair is. mirror, she noticed some letters scratched upon it How diamond. Letters and numbers traced by an unc hand. After much patience Marina was able to dec ong- the following curt inscription: — ote

'My portrait. 2d May 1802.'

A dim and distant light seemed to flash across Marina's memory—1802! Was not that the year in which the mad prisoner was kept confined at the palace? Perhaps she had written those words—perhaps the glove and the lock of hair were hers.

But hidden away by whom?

Marina, almost without knowing what she was about, took up the prayer-book and began turning over the leaves.

A sheet of paper fell out, folded several times and covered with a yellow, faded writing. She opened it and read as follows:—

'MEMORANDUM.

'*2d May* 1802.

Ca
too Yes, I must remember, great heavens! If not, why
her. a second existence? I have prayed to the Holy
that seand Saint Cecilia to reveal to me the name by
gazed on shall then be known. They have not granted
still ringit. Nevertheless, whatever be your name, you
to drink it ound and are reading these words, recognise

At lengthou dwells my own unhappy spirit. Before you and chanceou had undergone immense sufferings' (these she now gads were repeated ten times over in large fascinate heler the name of Cecilia.
one of the ner Marina Cecilia Verrega di Camogli, the
She lookedife of Emanuele d'Ormengo. Remember the
lid whereie 10th of January 1797, at Genoa, in the Villa
not one; remember the pale face, with the mole on the
felt cheek, of your sainted aunt, Sister Pellegrina Con-
Thru
betwRemember the name of Renato, the red and blue

uniform, the epaulettes, the gold lace and the white rose at the Doria's ball.

'Remember the big black coach, the snow, and the woman at Busalla, who promised to pray for me.

'Remember the vision which I had in this room two hours after midnight, the words of fire upon the walls, words in an unknown tongue, and yet clear to me in this one respect, that I gathered from them the comfort of a promise from heaven. I cannot repeat those words, I can but record their sense. They said that I should be born anew, that I should live again here between these walls, that here I should be avenged, that here I should again love Renato and be loved by him; they said something else, dark, incomprehensible, illegible, perhaps the name which he will then bear.

'I would fain write the story of my life, but the strength fails me; let the hints which I have given suffice.

'Change names with me. Let me return as Cecilia, let him love me under that name.

'This escritoire belonged to my mother; nobody knows the secret. I am placing in it the silver-mounted mirror which my mother got at Paris from Cagliostro. I have looked at myself in it long and fixedly; for the mirror retains the features of the last person who looks at herself in it. I have inscribed the date with my diamond ring.

'This is a lock of my hair. Don't you remember it? Just think. It is curious for me to be speaking to you as though you were not I! How soft and fine my hair is. It is going to be buried without a kiss or a caress. How fair it is. It is going to be buried.

'And you, too, little white hand. Put a glove alongside my hair to remind me of you, little hand. Note

that the thumb of the glove is a little short for me. Who knows whether I shall have so fine and soft a hand? One kiss, and farewell.

'I have but a few days longer to live. It is the evening of the 2d of May 1802. I know not the hour, for I have no watch.

'The windows are wide open, and this is what I feel. A soft mild air, and a greenish-blue sky, pleasant to gaze on. And the voices of the lake and the bells and these hot tears of mine, is it possible that you do not recall them?

'My soul, fasten upon this fact. Count Emanuele d'Ormengo and his mother are my murderers. Every stone in this house hates me. Nobody takes pity on me. And all for a flower, a smile, a calumny! But now no longer. For now, with heart and mind I am his, all his.

'Five years and four months have I passed here, without one word from them to me, or from me to them. When I am carried away to the churchyard perhaps they will come too. They will be in mourning, with grave faces, and will chant the responses: "*Lux perpetua luceat ei.*" Oh! that at that moment I could rise from my bier and speak.

'Mother! Father! Are you indeed dead and unable to defend me? Ah! vile d'Ormengo, they at least are free from suffering.

'Here let me pause a moment. My thoughts do not obey me, they move in a whirl, they all press close together here, in the middle of my forehead, in a wild hurly-burly from which there is no relief.

'Farewell! O Sun! till we meet again!

'Black door, black door, it is not yet time to open.

'Let me be calm. A few rules for that day.

'When, in the second life, I shall have found and reread this manuscript, I shall at once kneel down and return thanks to God; after that, having compared my hair with the lock I have placed here, having put on the glove and gazed at my reflection in the glass, I shall shatter the mirror into fragments, for it will have to be renewed before it can serve me again. Then I shall replace everything in the secret drawer. After that the spring must be pressed to make everything go into place.

'Put all your faith in the Divine promise; leave the rest to God.

'Let there be sons, nephews, cousins; the *vendetta* will be good for all. Wait for it here, here.

'CECILIA.'

Marina read the manuscript eagerly and did not understand.

She read it again. At the passage, 'You who have found and are reading these words, recognise that within you dwells my own unhappy spirit,' she stopped. She had not noticed them before. Her eye rested on these words, and her hands shook as they held the manuscript. But only for a moment. She continued to read, and the white, trembling hands seemed to be turned to stone.

On reaching the words, 'I shall at once kneel down and return thanks to God,' she folded the paper, keeping the place with the first finger of her right hand, and remained motionless, her head slightly bowed as though in thought.

She then returned to the manuscript and read it for the third time. Then she laid it down and took up the lock of hair. Her hands held it firmly and handled it

softly; there was no nervous tremor now. Her face was as marble; showing neither incredulity, nor belief, nor pity, nor fear, nor wonder.

There was a heavy footstep in the passage. Marina became transformed, her eye flashed, the hot blood rushed to her face; she violently closed the escritoire and strode towards the door.

It was Fanny, who had a step like a cuirassier's.

'Go away,' said Marina.

'The saints preserve us! How strange you look. What has happened?'

'Nothing; I do not require you this evening. You may go to bed,' repeated Marina, more composed in voice and manner. Fanny retired. Marina listened to her retreating footsteps till she heard them go down the stairs. Then she returned to the escritoire.

But she hesitated to re-open it, and looked at the curious carving, the allegorical figures in ivory inlaid in the ebony, which at that moment seemed to her to have the funereal expression of spectres rising to the surface of some stream in Hades.

She determined to open the escritoire.

She started back; the lid had been banged down hastily and the little mirror had been shattered to fragments as Cecilia had wished. Marina re-read the last page of the manuscript, unbinding her own hair and comparing a tress of it with that of Cecilia; the living and the dead were in no way similar.

She took up the glove. How cold it felt. It made her shiver. No, not even the glove fitted. It was too small.

Marina replaced in the secret drawer the manuscript, the book, the glove, the lock of hair, the silver frame, and the pieces of the mirror, and pressed hard on the

little knob. The spring clicked and the woodwork sprung back into its place.

Then Marina knelt down, placed her arms on the top of the escritoire, and hid her face. The candle burning above her head lighted with a golden shimmer the tresses of her hair, and seemed to be the only living object in the room. The flame rose and fell in strange fashion, as though anxious to descend and whisper to Marina, 'What is it?' But even had the spirit of light thus spoken in the little white ear of the prostrate girl, no reply would have been vouchsafed, for Marina was speechless and senseless; her heart barely beat, and the blood hardly stirred in her veins. Her strong will, her powerful intelligence alone, amid the dismal silence of the room, fought with the hideous phantom that had seized on her young life and now sought to poison her blood, encircle her form and consume her body and soul, with a view to replacing her identity with its own.

At other times Marina's worldly-wise scepticism would have prevented her from even allowing herself to be approached by any phantom from the other world; but that this veil of scepticism, which usually masked her thoughts like a growth of weed upon a stagnant pool, had been broken up and dispersed by the strange anguish of mind into which she had been thrown as she returned to the castle.

Her first impression as she grasped the weird idea suggested by the manuscript had been one of dread. This feeling she overcame by force of will, and determined to submit every circumstance to a cold scrutiny, and to thoroughly understand it. Giving herself up to a profound meditation on what she had read, she seemed to hear an imperious voice within her which said, 'No, it is not true.'

And then she began to harbour doubts as to this voice, and the voice was silent. If the voice's utterance was to carry weight it must represent a conclusion arrived at by weighty arguments which had passed through her mind with the rapidity of lightning. It was necessary to go through the mental process anew, to retrace the way step by step.

The writer of the manuscript was insane. The local tradition, her own confession, the exultation and feverish disorder of her ideas, the general tenour of the manuscript, all combined to establish this fact. Did the idea of a second existence on earth contain something so original as to constrain one to suspect inspiration from on high, and to force one to take Cecilia's visions seriously? No, it was a theory as old as the hills, one so widely known that the unhappy sufferer may easily have heard it, or read it, or found it, in her days of trouble, looking in the recesses of her memory. Seizing upon it she used it as a mental stimulant, nourished her thoughts on it; thus the idea became part of her being. And the visions? Doubtless the walls would give to the sufferer the answer which she implored with all the force of a strong will and a vivid imagination. They replied with letters of fire. Yes. With clearness? No. What meaning had the mirror, and the lock of hair, and the glove? What object was served by comparing the living hand and hair with the dead? Did she hope to be born anew, and to rise again?

No. The manuscript was the work of delirium. To prove the converse, it was necessary that Marina should feel some recollection of a past existence rising within her mind.

Disclose thy secrets, O! my soul. She commenced interrogating herself as to the past events alluded to in

the manuscript, like one who leans over a dark well and calls and listens for some voice or echo in reply.

Camogli? No echo, no recollection. Genoa? Silence. Sister Pellegrina Concetta, Renato? Silence. The Doria Palace, Villa Brignole, Busalla, Oleggio? Silence, always silence. Thus it happens that in some railway waiting-room filled with travellers, and dimly lighted by a smoky petroleum lamp, an official calls out a long list of names of distant stations. Nobody responds. They are waiting for another train. But who can say that there are not travellers for this line, who have not heard because they are lying asleep on the benches behind, wrapped up in their long cloaks?

'It is the work of a mad woman,' said Marina to herself, 'and I am making myself ridiculous, racking my brains about it in this fashion. Ridiculous!' she repeated out loud, and jumped to her feet. The word which she had uttered seemed to her to be harsher than the one which she had harboured in her thoughts. Not only harsher; exaggerated and false. It struck on her ear as though it had been uttered by somebody else. At the same time an uneasy sensation began to take possession of her, weariness alternating with impatience, while her will seemed to be paralysed.

It was a strange chance, she reflected, that had transported her, in the flower of her youth and beauty, from the bright city of Paris to this deserted room, left uninhabited for seventy years. A curious chance which had made her ring roll down to the spring of the secret drawer, thus revealing to her the sentence—

'You who have found and are reading these words, recognise that within you dwells my own unhappy spirit.'

Delirium. But was there any trace of imbecility in the manuscript? Exaltation, yes, confusion of thought,

yes, but after a captivity of five years to form so striking an ideal! An old established idea? But would not that be an argument in its favour? Marina began to tremble, she seemed to hear herself being called, being implored, by thousands of unknown spirits who had held this faith; for a moment she felt herself yielding to their entreaties. And the blood coursed ever more feverishly through her veins, while the action of her intellect and of her will grew feebler and feebler.

She could not recall Camogli or Genoa, Renato or Pellegrina Concetta, not one day of her previous existence, not one hour; but how many isolated moments! How often had there flashed across her mind the memory of moments shrouded in the shadow of an unknown past. On this very evening, the bells! Her blood ran cold, there was an indescribable choking gripping at her throat. She was seized with the fear of suffocating, with the wild instinct of self-preservation. Then the reflection struck her that she could not be Cecilia, because she had the Ormengo blood in her veins; but the stern monitor within her made reply—'No, what has the blood to do with it? You hate, you have ever hated, your uncle; the *vendetta* is thus of more exquisite relish. God, with a view to its more perfect accomplishment, has placed you, unrecognisable, in the midst of the enemy's household.'

A great fear came over Marina, she desired to escape from the conflict raging within her; she took hold of the candle and passed into her bedroom. The windows were open, a puff of wind blew out the light. She endeavoured to relight it, but did not know what she was doing, and gave up the attempt. She then flung herself down, half fainting, beside the window, for the breeze to revive her. There it suddenly flashed

across her how, on the evening of her arrival at the castle, looking out of that self-same window she had thought that she recognised in the darkness the form of an old dream, a weird spectre which had visited her years before, amid bright scenes and gay festivals. This was the final blow; an indescribable cloud settled down on thought and sight; she seemed to hear a thousand whispering voices all around her, rising upwards, then joining and uniting into one loud voice. She lifted both her hands to her forehead and fell to the ground.

The white figure lay there beneath the window in the dim starlight as though asleep. Who was to know that a woman had fainted? All the inmates of the castle were wrapt in slumber; outside, the crickets chirped merrily and the nightingales sang; the fresh, quick breezes of the clear spring night came in out of curiosity through the open windows, searched in all the corners, whispered mysteriously among themselves; while from a distant gondola that had lingered behind the others on the lake there floated the careless chant:—

'E cossa l'è sta Merica?
L'è un mazzolin di fiori
Cattato alla mattina
Per darlo alla Mariettina
Che siamo di bandonar.'

Only the fountain in the courtyard narrated, with an air of mystery, to the *arums*, a long, long story, which was listened to in religious silence. Not a leaf stirred. Perhaps it was the tale of the lady who had swooned away there hard by; but human ear could catch no syllable of what the fountain had to tell, or gather whether the lady's name was Marina di Malombra or Cecilia Varrega.

The result of this night was that Marina was prostrated with a violent attack of brain fever, the cause of which none could guess. It is well nigh certain that in the course of her delirium she must have allowed some allusion to the sinister cause of her overthrow to escape her; but such allusions must have been rare and vaguely worded, for they aroused no suspicion of the truth.

Moreover, Marina's strong will, albeit rudely shaken by her malady, was being acted on by a motive precedent. She wished to be silent. The presence of the Count was her severest trial. When he entered the room, or even when his step was heard in the passage, the patient became beside herself, and struggled convulsively without speaking; so that after the first few days these visits were discontinued. This open dislike to her kinsman was much commented on by the chattering gossips of R——, who put many absurd interpretations upon it. The one most in favour was that the Count wished to marry* Marina against her will, and that the girl had become distraught in consequence. The celebrated Professor B——, who had been summoned from Milan to assist the poor 'painter,' who was completely out of his depth, considered it his duty to sound the Count upon this delicate question, a task which he accomplished with the greatest tact under cover of the medical interest of the case. The Count's reply was not less diplomatic.

'My niece,' said he, 'is possibly under a certain obligation to me, though not one of such magnitude as to make her hate me. She is a young lady of great intelligence, while I am verging on my second childhood; I have reason to believe that we are, upon many subjects, as the poles asunder; these things being as they are,

* Such marriages occasionally occur in Italy.

the idea of marrying my niece has not occurred t
You may have heard the contrary from the local d
who sucks up like a sponge every stupid report tha
in circulation. It is his nature, and he cannot help it.
To return to the subject of my niece. Our first impressions of each other was unnecessarily disagreeable; these we subsequently modified not a little, and personally I have none but kindly feelings towards her. But I imagine, my dear professor, that when a person's brain is disordered and he or she says "black," one has to understand "white."'

Professor B——'s scientific skill, assisted by the humble ignorance of his colleague, overcame the malady. After a month and a half Marina reappeared in the loggia. Her face was pale, the pupils of her eyes were enlarged, and had a languorous and yet startled expression. She looked so fragile that one expected the wind to bend her form as it does a tiny jet of water from a fountain. Her vigour and her beauty soon returned, but a close observer could see that the expression of her face was changed. All the lines appeared sharper; her eyes had at times an unwonted dulness, or else a sinister fire that had hitherto been strange to them. The veil of dissimulation in which Marina had wrapped herself was cast aside. The memory of her little acts of hypocrisy irritated her. Her dresses, which hitherto had been in the severest taste and in harmony with her surroundings, so as not to offend her austere uncle, now assumed an aggressive and eccentric style. Clouds of white notes, crested and perfumed, again appeared piled up on the post-office counter. A constant stream of French plays and novels began to flow from the Librairie Dumolard towards the castle. The piano resounded at all hours, whether the Count was in the library or not, with lively

airs by Bellini, Verdi, and Mozart. Meyerbeer and Mozart were the only two composers to whom Marina forgave their German nationality; Meyerbeer in consideration of his French citizenship, Mozart in recognition of 'Don Giovanni.'

The wild excursions by mountain and lake, through wind and rain, by day and by night, recommenced; Rico acting with enthusiasm the part of guide, cavalier and faithful follower. To the great astonishment of the inhabitants of R——, Marina, moreover, now began to frequent the church where in the past she had never set foot. Truth to tell, her religious revival savoured slightly of the grotesque, for on Sundays and feast days she was still conspicuous by her absence, and only entered the church when nobody was there, sometimes early in the morning, sometimes in the evening. One day, finding the church closed, she proceeded to the vicarage to demand the key. The servant seemed to think that the sky was about to fall in when she opened the door to the 'lady of the castle,' and still more so on hearing her ask for the key of the church. Her first instinct was to slam the door in her face and refuse the key; but she only ventured so far as to say that she would refer to her master, to whom she ran as quickly as she could, begging him to invent some pretext for refusing the key to the witch outside. The good priest rebuked her sternly, and went himself to open the church for Marina, whose acquaintance he had already made on the occasion of one of his rare visits to the castle.

It is not difficult to imagine how, under such a state of things, the relations between uncle and niece developed. The two might be compared to two metal points, highly electrified, which, on approaching each other, at once emit sparks, and lightning flashes in

miniature. Marina had abandoned all ideas of travel. During her convalescence the doctor had mentioned the subject, giving a strong hint that the Count would assent to the idea, a fact of which he had assured himself beforehand. The patient replied that she had no idea of leaving the castle, that the air suited her remarkably well, and that the doctor did not know what he was talking about.

Marina and the Count, from this time forward, may be said only to have met at meal time, but their opposition to one another continued without a break. Even the articles of furniture were penetrated by that dull spirit of animosity, and seemed to range themselves now on this side now upon that. Some of the doors and windows were engaged in the contest two or three times a day. Marina had them opened, the Count ordered them to be shut. A poor old arm-chair, in the passage where the paintings were kept, lost his dignity and his peace of mind in the process. Almost every day one decree placed him in front of a fine Canaletto, and another decree sent him hurrying back to his original place. Fanny, in the discharge of her duties, took occasion to vaunt high the name and the wishes of her noble mistress; the other servants joined issue on behalf of their master. The excellent Giovanna essayed the part of peacemaker, but too often only with the result of drawing upon herself some impertinent remark from Fanny, which she resented and brooded over in silence. The Count detested scent of all kinds, which formed a sufficient reason for Marina to use them to excess. French books, which she left lying about here and there, seemed to laugh in the face of the old Gallophobe, and made him tremble with rage. The finest flowers in the garden disappeared before they were well in bloom, in spite of the old gentle-

man's denunciation of the gardener and of Fanny, to whom he attributed these depredations. He naturally treated his niece's maid with scant consideration, and on one occasion was on the point of having her ducked in the lake. The Count thought better of it and cancelled the order, but poor Fanny had a narrow escape of being dismissed instead. Rebukes were showered upon her frequently, in many instances couched in terms of excessive severity because they were aimed, not so much at her, as, through her, at her mistress.

Face to face with Marina, the Count kept himself in check, whether for the sake of his sister, to whom he had been warmly attached, or from chivalrous feeling, or from fear of exceeding due bounds. The bearing and behaviour which his niece had adopted for some time past had at first evoked serious reprimands on his part, administered in a tone half reproving, half sarcastic, and met by Marina with a cold dignity which only half masked a rising flood of passion and resentment. Withdrawing from this perilous path, the Count adopted the system of significant silence. It was a silence charged with electricity, only interrupted by flashes of disdain on the one side and of irony on the other. At times a small thunderstorm would break, only, however, to pass away and leave the sky clear as it had been before. The wretched Steinegge was in no enjoyable position between the two opponents; and Marina let no day pass without inflicting some slight upon him. 'Count,' began the poor man one day, 'I am aware that I have the misfortune to be no favourite with her ladyship, your niece. Possibly it is the fault of my weather-beaten countenance, which it is not, however, in my power to improve. If my presence in any way accentuates your little family differences, I will take my departure.'

'Help me to commit a harmless little escapade. I am just now in a state of astonishment at having read—either from caprice or through force of circumstances—an Italian novel. You may turn up your nose, but listen. This novel is, so to speak, like a nervous man whose gloves are too dark and whose tie is too bright, and who enters your drawing-room in a great state of embarrassment, bows to half a dozen people before his hostess, and then oscillates for a quarter of an hour between a chair, an arm-chair and a stool, and finally decides upon the seat that is farthest from the ladies. When he begins to talk, however, you notice that there is something about him different from the rest of your set. He is full of ideas, overflowing with energy; he is a *man!* Have you any men in your set, dear? If so, forgive me.

'I take not the slightest interest in learning either the name or the identity of the author, who goes under the simple pseudonym of Lorenzo. He may be a *bourgeois* with fair hair. The idea which I have formed is this: to engage in a literary correspondence! I am allowed so few whims that I give effect to those which I do have at once. Y writing to X! What fun, especially if X sends an answer to Y. It might happen that X is possessed of wit, which would afford amusement to poor Y, who is as bored as a princess. Meanwhile, X has no means of guessing from whence comes this letter; is it not a harmless escapade? So now, dear, you will leave the enclosed letter, which is addressed "To the Author of *A Dream*, c/o V—— & Co., Printers." This, however, is not all, as you doubtless guess. Would you be so kind as to send to the post-office in a few days' time and inquire whether there are any letters for Doctor R——, and, if so, to forward them to me? Counting

upon you, I have given that address, which is an absolutely safe one. The affair is so harmless that it may possibly tempt you to ask for your husband's permission to take part in it. In any event, be silent as to me.

'My respects *à ton très-haut seigneur et maître*, if you see him.

'Farewell, love. I am reading an old book. *L'Amour*, by Stendhal. It is written *au bistouri*. MARINA.'

Signora De Bella, whose natural inquisitiveness had led her into more than one freak less innocent than this one, replied half in jest, half in reproof, threatened her friend with a moral lecture, and concluded by undertaking the commission; secretly reserving to herself the right of reading the first letter before forwarding it. She was, above all things, a conscientious person.

The author of *A Dream* did not lose much time before replying. He maintained, with greater feeling than logic, his pre-expressed opinion in regard to the decrees of fate and the force of the human will. He demonstrated how, in events to bring about which the will must assent to acts affecting man's conscience, the will is indeed a principal element; an unknown variable which, when introduced into calculations founded on fixed natural laws, renders the result ever uncertain. He denied the theory of the will assenting to evil by preordained necessity. He argued that it is a necessary corollary of human liberty that man should be able to decide in favour of what is good. He urged that the necessary impulse is derived from the depths of man's nature, where it exists in mysterious contact with the deity, and receives thence a vast, but indefinable, force.

This divine influence, which undeniably lies at the

origin of all human action, surely, by its very nature, is opposed to moral evil and, *à priori*, must exclude the necessity of evil. The learned author developed his arguments with an ingenuous energy sufficient to exclude him from the reproach of pedantry, but apt to rouse a suspicion that he was anxious to convince not only his correspondent but himself as well. That there are malignant spirits which make a sport of us is certain, he proceeded; nay, they may even deceive us into a false notion of fatalism. Everything points to the belief that, as we exercise power over the beings inferior to ourselves, so we ourselves are subject, within certain limits, to the action of other beings of attributes more powerful than ours. We fall into the habit of attributing to chance that which is, as a fact, effected by them.

Prophetic dreams, presentiments, sudden artistic inspirations, sudden flashes of genius, blind impulses towards good or evil, inexplicable fits of high spirits and depression, the involuntary action of the memory, are probably all controlled by superior beings, partly good, partly bad.

Such considerations, however, wrote Lorenzo, all fall to the ground if we deny God. He then added the hope that Cecilia was not an atheist, for in that event he would be compelled, with great regret, to break off the correspondence.

He next turned to the question of the transmigration of souls.

Lorenzo believed in the theory. The condition of a soul in a human body is undoubtedly one of repression, of pain, and this can only be explained by sins committed in a previous state. The sufferings of innocent creatures, the unequal distribution of sorrow and happiness, the fact that some souls quit this life unsoiled, within an

hour of entering on it, thus obtaining that reward which costs others long years of bitter strife, all these phenomena can best be explained by attributing to our present life the character of a state of expiation and preparation.

Admitting the theory of transmigration, the author added that human reasoning can go no farther, and that the problem, whether our previous existences were earthly ones or astral, is insoluble, and that attempts to answer it are mere efforts of fancy.

This tremendous epistle, forming a whole volume, concluded with the hope, beautifully and poetically expressed, that the mysterious correspondence might be continued. The Signora de Bella's supple fingers quickly undid the envelope, but so much philosophy was too much for her, and she hastily skipped from the first page to the last.

She then wrote a line to Marina to this effect:—

'I am certain that the letter is everything it should be; it is so heavy.'

Marina, for her part, read the document greedily. The ingenuousness of the writer in replying with such expansiveness to an unknown correspondent raised a slight smile; but she trembled slightly as she read the name 'Cecilia.' It was only natural that he should so address her; yet she was profoundly impressed.

After a few days she wrote again, completely concealing her real feelings. Passing altogether from questions of fatalism and transmigration she sought rather, it seemed, to rouse her correspondent to exercise his wit and irony, if he had any, by teasing him whenever a chance offered. She laughed at the pedantry which marked his epistle, at the common-place nature of his *nom de plume*, and inquired whether there was any basis of fact at the bottom

of his novel, and whether he had published other books, and if so, why he concealed the fact.

This letter reached Corrado Silla about a fortnight before he left Milan. We already know in what manner he answered it.

CHAPTER VI

A GAME OF CHESS

'YES, Christianity I can understand,' remarked the Count, as he took up a bishop and examined it attentively. 'What are those stupid servants about, to keep us in the dark like this?'

The windows were half closed, and the outer blinds closed also.

Silla rose to let in a little daylight.

'No, I beg of you; let those people of mine come. Will you have the kindness to touch the bell? There, near the door, that round knob, twice. Christianity. Oh! I do not propose that you should write against Christianity. You say that, after all, it was Christianity which brought the doctrine of equality into the world. But what do you desire to prove by that argument? That prior to Christianity there were no such things as democracies?'

'My scheme is that our book shall treat of the doctrine of equality in its worst development, that is to say, in the field of politics. And among the other superstitions that we have to pulverise, will be the superstition that the author of this coarse equality of the politicians was Christ. For the rest, listen to me. Equal before God, I grant you, is well enough—the point of view is one of vast distance—but equal among ourselves! One requires

great stubbornness, a great physical and intellectual blindness, to maintain that we are equal one to the other. If there is one thing which arrests men's attention it is their natural inequality in mind and body. My cook, for example, is much more like Hannibal and Scipio than a gorilla is, but he is not their equal; and all the rhetoricians of 1789, and the self-seeking demagogues from then to now, will not make him so. Check.'

'You cannot move there. But pardon my pointing out that mankind possesses in common the great fundamental constituents of human character, which are known to all, and many other more subtle points of uniformity. I believe that men resemble each other in their moral characteristics far more than they seem to do. Ought not these points of uniformity to be recognised by law? Do they not justify the doctrine of equality and the reasonable application of it? That there were democracies before Christianity I admit; all the principles of Christianity were in existence, one may say, but it was Christianity which furnished them with a foundation, a stimulus, an ideal. Consider the immense importance attached to each human soul; consider the doctrine of goodwill among men; there is no more powerful leveller than love.'

'Excuse my saying that there is some youthful confusion of thought in what you urge. Granting that the modern democracy is based upon rapacity and arrogance, not upon love; yet I maintain that love tends to maintain inequalities; I maintain that the more a servant loves his master, the more a soldier loves his general; the more a woman loves a man, the more a weak man loves a strong one; the more a small man loves a big man, the more are these inequalities respected. It is rapacity and arrogance that tends to destroy them.'

'But your argument assumes that the love is all on one side,' rejoined Silla. 'And on the side of inferiority. Whereas I take it that there is a little love on the other side too.'

'Certainly I assume that the love is on the inferior's side. Perhaps you will tell me that God, of his love, was made man? I will not enter upon that field. I maintain that he who loves, if he be a man of intelligence, cannot, and dare not, divest himself of the social functions which belong to him. Believe me, your religion, which inculcates respect for the inequalities created by human laws, ought still more to preserve respect for those which bear the impress of a superior being's will. Your love of your neighbour might be better employed than in jerrymandering democratic republics, and preaching the equality of the pawns and the other pieces, because they are all made of wood, and live on the same chess-board. But, my dear sir, half an hour ago I said, "Check to your king."'

'You can't; there is the knight.'

The Count inclined his big, shaggy head over the chess-board.

'True,' he remarked; 'one cannot see in this light. But just look whether no one has come. No, I do not wish that you should have the trouble of opening the blinds.'

He rose and touched the bell.

'Count,' said Silla, 'you must excuse me if I put a question to you.'

'By all means.'

'According to your view, are differences of birth also among those differences which are to be respected?'

'By my faith, I should think they were. I would

make you a present of hundreds of squireens of the present day at a halfpenny the pair, but do not you understand that the differences in the type of individuals creates the different types of families, and that the great families which have been pushed to the front by a mighty impulse, and have maintained their high position for centuries, play a leading part in the social system, and are, in a sense, superior beings. Living, as they do, for four, five, six hundred years, and disposing of a force altogether above the ordinary, they are able to preserve their healthy traditions through many generations, oppose to the passing interests of the day the vital interests of the country, place the fruits of their ripe experience at the service of the State, and act as a guide and an example to the people.'

'Your lordship rang?' inquired the footman.

'In the name of all that's holy,' cried the Count, 'who ordered you to keep all the windows closed?'

'I did not shut them; it must have been Miss Fanny.'

The Count brought down his clenched fist on the table.

'Where is Miss Fanny?'

'I believe she is downstairs in the courtyard.'

'What is she doing there?'

The footman hesitated for a moment.

'I do not know,' he answered.

The Count got up, walked to the window and flung it open, muttered something in forcible Piedmontese, and said to the footman,—

'Let them both come up.'

The footman bowed.

'So you did not know, didn't you?' exclaimed the Count.

The discomfited servant withdrew.

'It is too absurd,' said the Count. 'That ass of a

doctor making love to my niece's maid. Billing and cooing in the garden like two doves.'

A minute later the 'painter' entered, blushing crimson and exclaiming,—

'What a coincidence! what a coincidence! to have arrived just in time to play a little game—'

'With Fanny,' interposed the Count. The doctor laughed heartily and remarked that his lordship was pleased to be facetious. Though there was not much mirth on the Count's face, upon which the doctor kept his eyes fixed, laughing ever less and less. He then remarked that Fanny had not come because she had been called away by her mistress.

'Allow me to give up my place to the doctor,' said Silla, rising from his seat. The doctor protested vigorously, declaring that he was quite content to look on, and that, moreover, the Count cared little about playing chess with him. But Silla insisted; he feared that there was going to be a scene and had no wish to be present at it.

'I will come back later on,' he remarked, 'and go on with the game.'

He had hardly gone when Fanny, in high dudgeon, appeared in the doorway and asked tartly,—

'What do you require?'

'That you should come here.'

Fanny opened the door a little wider, but did not move.

'Come here!' cried the Count

Fanny moved a step forward.

'In future you will not take upon yourself either to open or to close the windows in my house, and you will not waste your time in the garden, where you have no business.

The wretched doctor, in an agony of suspense, was sitting with the tip of his nose between the king and the queen, and gazing sternly at the hostile king's pawn.

'It was her ladyship,' began Fanny, in an irritating tone, and twisting the door-handle round and round in her hand.

'Tell her ladyship to come here,' interposed the Count.

Fanny went out, slamming the door and muttering to herself.

'Silly wench!' said the Count, as he withdrew his queen from the hostile bishop's second square, where he had moved her, without noticing that she was threatened by a knight. He made another move and then added,—'Don't you think so, doctor?'

'Perhaps she is just the least bit flighty,' replied the doctor in trepidation, moving his queen's pawn forward two squares, and threatening the pawn of the opposing king.

'Bear in mind, my dear doctor,' said the Count, 'not to lose your head over the queen's handmaidens, especially when playing in my house; it will not be to your advantage.'

The doctor made his knight give an eccentric jump.

'What are you doing?' asked the Count. The doctor struck his forehead with his hand, withdrew the piece, and explained that the great heat had made him stupid, that he had left home at eleven and had paid four or five visits in the full glare of the sun.

'Oh!' exclaimed the Count, starting up and looking at the time, 'I was forgetting. It is I who am absent-minded. I have an appointment with some friends.'

The poor doctor could hardly believe his good fortune, and that the painful episode was at an end.

'We will leave the game to another day,' said he, 'I will come again.'

At this moment Fanny once more appeared on the scene.

'Her ladyship would wish to know for what purpose your lordship desires her presence.'

'Tell her ladyship that I beg her to come down and finish, in my place, a game of chess with the doctor.'

'I beg of you,' exclaimed the latter, 'that nobody will put themselves out on my account.'

'Go and tell your mistress,' said the Count.

When he was left alone the doctor's eyes began to sparkle. 'Not to lose my head over the queen's hand-maidens, indeed!' he remarked to himself, rubbing his hands; 'for your pretty face I will risk it.'

He had recently obtained from Fanny a promise to meet him that night at the little chapel, a solitary spot beside the lake, some little distance from the castle. Fanny said she would be there with the boat after midnight. The doctor kept walking restlessly round the room in search of a looking-glass, in which to see his beaming countenance and congratulate himself on his felicity. There were no mirrors in the room; there were only the panes of the open windows, in which he succeeded in discerning a faint image of his smiling features. He looked down into the courtyard, in which he had been caught talking to Fanny by the Count, and muttered to himself,—

'Hang the window!'

The Count crossed the courtyard and boldly faced the ascent of the steep stone steps, in the blaze of the mid-day sun, through the deep, motionless shadows of the cypresses, and the rustling of the gleaming vine leaves stirred by the southern wind. The doctor glanced at the

retreating figure, and then, with his mind at rest, slipped away in search of Fanny.

Meanwhile, the white queen's pawn and the black king's pawn, standing motionless on adjoining squares, were asking one another whether there was peace, or an armistice, or a council of war. But as to this, they and their comrades were alike in ignorance. It was remarked, both by the black warriors and by the white, that the campaign was unskilfully conducted, and without energy, and that military operations appeared to give away to diplomatic action of vague and variable character, in which, from various motives, various powers took a hand. As a matter of fact, what was going on resembled the action of the wind upon the lake on one of those wild days when the surface of the water is barely ruffled, while above the mountain summits the gale is blowing great guns, and the storm clouds are gathering dark and menacing.

'Here I am,' said Silla, as he entered the room. Then he suddenly stopped. Where had everybody gone to? He went up to the chess-board. The game was unfinished; in fact, since he had left it, only two moves had been made. He looked about the room, and, seeing the doctor's hat and stick on a chair, concluded that at anyrate he would soon be back, and so stood by the window to wait.

He thought of what the Count had said about the politician's theory of equality, and about the privileges of birth. Silla felt as though a dark cloud had risen up before him. He had not, indeed, made a special study of these questions, but, ever since he left the University, he had been nourished on ideas opposed to those of the Count; he had breathed the bracing air that moves through the modern democracy, and it

seemed to him well-nigh incredible that a republican like the Count should hold the opinions he did. He now understood the meaning of certain phrases and expressions used from time to time by the Count, to which he had not been able to attach their true significance; and Silla began to blame himself for having accepted, with too light a heart, the literary collaboration which the Count had offered him.

When the latter had explained to him the plan and scope of the proposed work, which he intended to entitle *Principles of Political Positivism*, Silla had indeed reserved his freedom of judgment in regard to the question of republican and monarchical institutions, but he had not been prepared for this new source of estrangement. The Count had at once accepted Silla's conditions, declaring that under no circumstances would he ask him to sacrifice his personal opinions, and he added that, by handling the subject on general principles, they might perhaps find themselves more at one than at first sight seemed probable; and that, in any case, every contentious question would be submitted to discussion.

They had then set to work, beginning with a rapid review of the progress of science from the time of the Greeks onwards. But Silla now felt that the difference of opinion was more acute. What course should he adopt? Enter on a discussion in which he might come off second best by reason of inferior training? This was repugnant to him. On the other hand, what hardness, what audacity characterised the Count's ideas, what contempt for the opinions of the public and for the general drift of human progress. It would be inexpressibly humiliating to retire without a contest, to lose himself in the crowd and leave this aristocrat in

his haughty position of one against all the world. He ought to be confronted face to face. It was not the time for Silla to identify himself with democratic passions and prejudices; but to stand forth and uphold the nobility and the grandeur of the principles of equality, with the aid of that religious spiritualism which should regulate the application of the principle in accordance with an elevated ideal of brotherly love. The errors, the injustice, the blindness, the insupportable pretensions of modern democracy must be frankly admitted; but the pride of birth, the pride of privilege must be attacked and beaten down. Silla waxed warm as the last thought passed through his mind, his heart beat quicker, and haughty, passionate words fell from his lips; but they were not addressed to the Count.

No, little by little, involuntarily, Silla imagined himself face to face with Donna Marina, saw her pass by with her air of haughty indifference, rendered more striking by the very delicacy and grace of her presence, and with that cold glance which only lighted up when it met that of the Count. It was to her that Silla, in his own mind, addressed his eloquence. In three weeks she had honoured him with perhaps as many words; and, without saying so, she had made him understand perfectly well that she considered him worthy neither of courtesy nor of ordinary civility. Such, at least, was the impression which she had conveyed to Silla, and after the first few days at the castle, Silla had taken measures accordingly. Her hauteur he met with hauteur, and yet not without suffering in the contest, not without a certain bitterness of passion which, in her presence, seemed to gnaw his heart. And now it appeared to him that he was crossing her path, that he stopped her, that he asked whether she really believed. . . .

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'Well, doctor?' said a voice behind him.

Silla turned round hastily. Yes, it was Donna Marina herself, seated before the chess-board.

'I take the black,' said she, looking the pieces carefully over.

She had come then, sailing into the room lightly as a fairy; or else Silla had got lost in the intensity of his own thoughts!

He did not stir.

'Doctor!' said Marina, in a tone of surprise. Then she raised her head and saw Silla. For a moment she knit her brows, and returned to her examination of the chess-board, then, in her usual frigid tone, she inquired,—

'Where is the doctor?'

'I do not know, Marchesina.'

'Close the venetian blinds a little,' Marina added almost *sotto voce*, without looking at him.

Silla pretended not to have heard her, left the window, and passed behind her on his way out of the room. She did not raise her head, but when Silla was near the door she said, in the same even tone,—

'May I ask you kindly to close the blinds.'

Silla turned back in silence without hurrying, drew the outer blinds nearer to the window, and again made for the door.

'Can you play chess?' said Donna Marina.

Silla stood still in astonishment.

This time she had raised her head, but the room was dark now, and he could not see what expression she wore. The voice betokened indolent coldness. Silla bowed.

Perhaps Donna Marina expected that he would offer to finish the game with her, but no such offer came.

With a gesture of her right hand she indicated that the chair opposite to her was empty, but her head remained motionless. That wave of the hand evidently said, not 'I request,' but 'I permit.'

Silla felt humiliated. Perhaps it was the subtle perfume which now filled the room, the same perfume which he had noticed on the day of his arrival in the picture gallery, that soothed his pride, and, in Marina's name, whispered so many pleasant things to him. He wished to refuse the challenge and he could not do so.

'You are afraid?' asked Donna Marina.

Silla took the empty chair.

'Of winning, my lady,' he replied.

She raised her eyes to his. Then Silla began to feel the languorous charm of her face; he looked full into those large, clear eyes which seemed to question him as closely as her lips did.

'Why of winning?'

'Because I do not know how to take the second place when I do not deserve it.'

She slightly raised her eyebrows, as another would have shrugged the shoulders, looked at the chess-board with forefinger on chin, and said,—

'My move.'

She stretched out her hand, but held it for a moment hovering over the pieces. The bright ray of light which entered between the half-closed blinds fell on her wavy hair, on her pale cheek, on the delicate little ear, on the tiny white hand hanging in mid-air, with its soft rose tints beneath the clear skin; it lit up the calm face of a beautiful woman intent upon the game. Silla was not so tranquil; involuntarily, as he gazed upon her, he felt that he could kiss that face, and bite it.

Donna Marina took the white queen's pawn and threw it back into the box.

'You are sure you play as well as I do?' said she.

'I do not know how you play,' replied Silla, moving a bishop.

Marina uttered a short, metallic laugh as she looked at the hostile bishop.

'But I know how you play. You play a cautious game. You are afraid of losing, not of winning.'

At this moment the doctor opened the door, and seeing that the game was in progress stood still. Marina appeared not to see him. He went out, shutting the door very quietly.

'What move are you going to make?' continued Marina in a sharper tone. 'Why don't you bring out the queen? Why don't you attack in earnest?'

'I am not going to attack. I am playing a defensive game, and I can assure you that my defence is fairly strong. Why do you wish me to attack?'

'Because in that case I should finish the game more quickly.'

'That depends.'

'Try,' said Marina.

Silla bent over the board, scanning it closely.

Donna Marina made a movement of impatience, and rose to her feet.

'Such deep study is useless,' she remarked. 'I assure you that you will not win. You will not win,' she repeated, throwing the pieces into disorder and overturning them with her hand. 'I have only played this one game with you, and I don't think I shall ever play another.'

'All the better for you,' she added.

'Not at all. Neither better nor worse.'

'True,' she rejoined sarcastically, 'you are not here in

order to play chess with me. You are here to prosecute profound studies with Count Cæsar, are you not? What do you study?'

Silla was pleased at the irritation she displayed; it was a victory for him.

'They are studies which would not interest your ladyship.'

Marina seemed lost in thought for a moment. Then she went back to her seat.

What doubts, what ideas of conciliation were passing through her mind? She took in both hands a little gold cross, which hung from her neck over the *décolleté* dress, and toyed with it, while her chin sunk on to her breast and the movement of her hands uncovered a little of the moulded arms.

'Very deep, those studies of yours, I suppose?' she remarked.

'Oh, no.'

'You think, then, that they are too high for me?'

'I did not say so.'

'Let us see; are they mathematics?'

'No.'

'Metaphysics?'

'No.'

'The black art, perhaps? The Count has a good deal of the sorcerer about him, don't you think, Signor—Signor— Your name is—?'

'Silla.'

'Do not you think so, Signor Silla?'

'No.'

'You are very reserved.'

There was silence for a moment. Then the voice of the Count was heard, with those of other persons all coming down the stairs together.

Silla stood up.

'Wait a moment,' she said brusquely.

'I don't want to have any Sphinxes about me. What is it that you are writing with my uncle?'

'A troublesome book.'

'That is understood; but what is it about?'

'The science of politics.'

'Your are a politician?'

'Something better; I am an artist.'

'A professional musician, do you mean?'

'Your ladyship has a ready wit.'

'And you are very proud.'

'Possibly.'

'And by what right?'

As she uttered these words Marina smiled a curious smile, the venom of which was unobserved by Silla.

'By the right of reprisals,' he replied.

'Oh!' exclaimed Marina. A look of scorn flashed from her eyes. At that moment the same thought occurred to each of them, the thought of a bond linking their future destinies together, but linking them by a chain of antagonism and of enmity.

'It is true then,' said Marina, *sottovoce*, 'that there is another game which you are playing?'

'I?' replied Silla, in amazement. 'I do not understand to what you refer.'

'Oh, you understand. But you play the game quietly, cautiously; you have not yet moved the queen. It is a poor thing, that pride of yours. And you talk about reprisals! Do you not know what kind of woman I am? Some time ago they wrote of me that I am arrogant, that I should like to take up my abode in some bright star, and that in this vulgar, scandal-loving planet of

ours there is no sp[illegible]oetic and artistic genius, he had de-
reply that I have f[illegible]hanical machine. There was also the

'Ah! here is m[illegible] a fashionable young man, with a shy
room with his gue[illegible] of a blushing bride newly married.

Silla did not s[illegible]e lady above him smile. This con-
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dure one grover, the admirers prostrate at her

a vulgar set after all. The Commendatore

Then there was Commendatore Vezza, a literary man, an aspirant for a post on the Council of education, and a candidate for the Senate.

He was a small man of rotund figure, brimming over with wit and learning, a favourite with the ladies, though he failed to please the lady in the picture. She was not literary; and she only laughed at his sheep's eyes, stumpy figure, and general resemblance to a soldier made of guttapercha. Present also was the Professor Cavaliere Ferrieri, an engineer, with expressive features, intelligent eyes, a sceptical smile, and brains of excellent quality. Yet even he failed to charm the beautiful Venetian. She belonged too much to the sixteenth century, and he too much to the nineteenth. Born

with a spark of poetic and artistic genius, he had degraded it to a mechanical machine. There was also the Advocate Bianchi, a fashionable young man, with a shy manner like that of a blushing bride newly married. He also made the lady above him smile. This concluded the list of strangers, for we cannot include among them the sorry figure of the old doctor, who had slipped into the dining-room without being invited.

The cause of all these people being assembled together at the castle was the solitary little stream which flows from the lake towards the west, in and out among the poplar trees. Some Milan capitalists had commissioned Professor Ferrieri to report whether there was sufficient water-power for a large paper mill.

The professor was to draw up a scheme and to approach the local authorities, with a view to the construction of a road and a free grant of communal land. His reputation stood high as an engineer; and three or four lines with his signature attached would attract shareholders in hundreds. With him was his nephew, an attorney, his legal adviser in the negotiations.

The politician and the man of letters had joined the party to pay a long-deferred visit to the castle, promised since 1859.

The dinner was excellent, and was enlivened with a flow of wit. The jests of the deputy alternated with the academic insipidities of the man of letters, and the incisive epigrams of the engineer.

The deep voice of the Count frequently drowned the voices of his guests, the clinking of plates and glasses, the disagreeable clashing of empty dishes, and all the sounds of a dinner-party. Meanwhile, the young attorney held his tongue and ate little, drank water and feasted his eyes on Marina.

Steinegge and the doctor spoke together in low tones, and occasionally, but rarely, exchanged a word with Silla. The latter, absorbed in other thoughts, sometimes made no response, sometimes replied at random.

Marina, too, spoke little.

Her neighbours, the two commendatori, made elaborate efforts to lead her into conversation, but only succeeded in extracting an occasional monosyllable.

Yet the expression of her face, which she did not once turn towards Silla, did not betoken anxiety or trouble of any kind. Vezza, whose weakness was a desire for universal knowledge, asked her, as a last resort, whether she had seen the latest fashion in embroidery, which everyone at Milan was now learning. She replied with a low exclamation of contemptuous surprise, which confused the learned man, and compelled him to seek refuge in the general conversation. This turned on the new paper mill. The engineer was boasting of the new machines which they were going to introduce for the manufacture of *papier mâché*. Steinegge expressed surprise that this was a novelty in Italy; it was, he said, well known in Saxony. Vezza remarked that in Italy their shareholders were made of *papier mâché*, and their share certificates of rags; and he then proceeded to comment ill-naturedly on the new Germanism of industry, which, in his opinion, was as objectionable as the Germanism of letters. The discussion grew warm; Finotti supported Vezza; the engineer opposed him. Steinegge, as red as a peony, fumed in silence, and poured out libations of Sasella and Barolo on the altar of his injured patriotism.

'That is the best Italian poetry, is it not?' the engineer remarked with a smile.

Steinegge clasped his hands, gave a sigh, and raised

his eyes towards heaven in silence, like a middle-aged seraph in an ecstasy.

'Hear! hear! Steinegge, bravo!' cried the deputy. 'By the way, Cæsar, the Mayor and Corporation of R—— will soon be here, will they not, in order to discuss matters with Ferrieri, with you as chairman? You ought to dip them all in this Barolo. However tough their worships may be, our friend here would swallow them one after the other.'

'Ah! you don't know them,' replied the Count. 'They will drink in my wine and the professor's arguments, they will gulp down everything and decide upon nothing. The more attention one shows to people of that kind, the more distrustful they become. They are not altogether wrong in that, after all.'

'Perhaps you are right. But the professor brings no gift in his hand, and his features are anything but classical. What do you think, Marchesina?'

Marina replied drily that she took no interest in the classics.

'And our friend there has spent forty years in forgetting the little he knew. Don't pay any attention to him. For the rest, the plan is simple enough. Two hundred and fifty workpeople and a dozen superintendents. We have enough water-power for many factories. A railway will be the next thing. In short, the Corporation of R—— must present me with the road and land, and the freedom of the borough.'

'Castles in the air! Ah, a trout, *salmo pharius*. Your paper mills will soon put an end to these.'

With this remark, Vezza entered upon a lively conversation with the Count, the engineer and Steinegge, about trout of every kind and pisciculture in general. The politician had meanwhile buttonholed the doctor

on the subject of Corrado Silla; greedily fastening on the malicious rumour concerning the young man's origin. When he could place his finger on a human weakness of this kind, in an unexpected quarter, he was truly happy.

'Well,' Vezza was remarking, 'for trout you may bait with a fly or with a worm.'

'Or a German poet,' suggested the engineer.

'No, who cares for them? He might perhaps attract a corporation of the lake country.'

The commendatore stopped abruptly, for just then the footman announced the Mayor and Corporation of R——.

This was the signal for a general move, shifting of chairs, formal introductions, and an eloquent toast by Vezza to the future prosperity of the borough of R——, 'so worthily and wisely represented.' The municipal councillors looked at him in stupefaction, and with the vague anxiety of those who hear their praises sung and do not know why. Then all rose from the table, and the Count, the engineer, the young advocate and the mayor and corporation drew on one side to discuss matters.

Finotti offered his arm to Donna Marina, whispering a few words in French, with a smile provoked probably by the musty municipal councillors. They brought with them an odour of fustian. Passing from the close room to the fresh air of the loggia, one was met by the sweet perfume of the flowers in the court below. The mountains, and the lake which reflected them, were aglow with a golden light. The western sky was bright and clear. In the east, the gleaming summits of the Alpe dei Fiori touched the dark and stormy sky.

'Beautiful, indeed,' said Finotti as he leant over the balustrade. 'Beautiful, but too lonely a scene. How do you find the time pass in this hermitage, Marchesina?'

'It does not pass, not altogether,' replied Marina.

'But I suppose there is some civilised being in the neighbourhood with whom you can exchange ideas?'

'Yes, there is one. He paints.'

She pointed towards the doctor, who was standing open-mouthed listening to a vivacious dialogue between Vezza and Steinegge. Silla stood on one side, looking at the fountain in the courtyard.

'But Cæsar has always guests with him,' insisted Finotti. 'Even now, I fancy,' he added with a tone full of suggestiveness, and looking towards the young lady, who bit her lip and was silent.

'How does he come to be a friend of Cæsar's?' inquired the commendatore, *sottovoce*.

'I don't know.'

'And yet I envy him.'

'Why?'

'He lives near you.'

'That may not be so agreeable to those who do not please me,' said Marina, with the tone and air of one intending to cut short the conversation.

'Vezza!' called out Finotti in a loud voice. 'How can you stand there discussing trout and crawfish when there is a lady present? 'I observe that my most worthy friend, the doctor, is not a little shocked.'

The worthy doctor became convulsed with protestations.

'Marchesina,' remarked Vezza, drawing nearer, 'please observe how a friend is rewarded for his self-sacrifice in yielding the best place to another.'

'Ah! Was it yours?' rejoined Marina, with one of her curious smiles, and, without awaiting a reply, she turned to Steinegge and said,—

'Three chairs.'

There were five people in the loggia, and not a single chair.

'When a young lady gives the order,' replied Steinegge, after a moment's silence, 'a cavalry officer will bring thirty.'

Finotti was looking at Silla. His face was pale, and he was watching Marina with so contemptuous a light in his eyes that he attracted the attention of the dilettante student of practical psychology.

'Everybody standing?' remarked the Count, entering the loggia at that moment with the engineer, the attorney and the municipality. 'My dear Steinegge, have the goodness to tell them to bring some chairs. The professor wishes to construct a dam to regulate the overflow of the lake, and to see what else may be necessary. These gentlemen prefer to stay behind.'

'We shall be in the way otherwise,' said one of them.

'Well, well,' said the Count, 'you must pay your respects to my niece. When you are ready, professor.'

The professor hastily shook hands with the five worthy councillors, and went away with the Count.'

'We will make the bears dance,' whispered Finotti to Donna Marina.

But the bears were less bearish than was supposed. Three of them, two of the assessors and the mayor, knew better than to say a single word. The other two, the assessor, who really did the work, could give points in knavery to the commendatore himself. In activity of tongue they were little behind him, allowing for the fact

that they were peasants; fat and well-to-do, indeed, but still peasants of the farmyard and the plough.

'We are poor country bumpkins,' remarked one of them. They had a very fine sense of humbug.

The conversation naturally turned on the paper mill. Finotti gave an enthusiastic sketch of the wonderful industries which would spring up, of the fabulous profits that would accrue to the neighbourhood. His two listeners vigorously nodded assent, rubbing their knees gently with their hands

'How sharp the world has become,' said the elder of them.

'Yet we remain round,' replied his colleague; 'at least, as long as they don't plane us down.'

'A wealthy commune, I believe,' said Finotti.

'So, so. You see our public pastures in front of you. When they have given place to the new road leading to the paper-mill, we shall know what it is to be well-to-do. For the present, things are only middling.'

'I don't know whether it is the wine which the Count was good enough to give us, but it seems to me that in the time that's coming we shall all rise in the world. It was a fine wine; whether one can trust it I don't know. What do you say, Signor Steinegge? I have seen you occasionally at hump-backed Cecchina's.'

'Ah, ah!' murmured Steinegge, who did not altogether understand.

'Gracious!' exclaimed Vezza, observing the heavy black clouds banked up in the east. 'We are going to have a storm.'

'I think not,' replied one of the assessors.

'Not just now; to-night, perhaps.'

'What do you call those rocks shining in the sun?'

'We call them the Alpe dei Fiori. As a youngster, I

have been up those hills hay-making. A better name for them would be Alpe del Diavolo.'

'It is true the Devil's Cave is up there,' said the other assessor.

'Oh! there's a devil's cave?' remarked Silla. 'And why so called?'

'I don't know, I'm sure. Better ask the women. They tell a hundred stories about it.'

'For instance?'

'For instance, they say that through that cave one goes straight away to Hell, as straight as an arrow, and that all the Evil One's special favourites take that road. They even mention the names of three or four.'

'Indeed,' chimed in Finotti. 'Let us hear them.'

'Oh, really, I've forgotten.'

'People from these parts?'

'Some, yes; some, no, I forget.'

At this point, in an evil moment, the worthy mayor abandoned his prudent reserve.

'But, Pietro, you surely remember one. The mad lady.'

'Ass,' murmured his irreverent colleague to himself, and then relapsed into silence.

'Well done most worshipful mayor! Of course, you ought to know by what road your subjects leave this world. Tell us all about it. It is not an official secret, let us hope.'

The mayor, recognising too late that he had put his foot in it, wriggled uneasily in his chair.

'Old fables,' he replied, 'old country tales. It all happened six hundred years ago, or thereabouts.'

'Oh! six hundred! Something under sixty would be nearer the mark,' said one of the town councillors, who had not yet spoken.

'Well, well, sixty or six hundred; in any case, it is an old story, and can hardly interest the present company.'

But the unfortunate mayor, finding himself in a tight place and unable to escape, at last unburdened himself, and told the whole story without further reserve.

'Well, this mad lady was the first wife of the previous Count; a Genoese lady who, it would appear, committed some small indiscretion, and her husband brought her here, to the castle, and kept her imprisoned there; he himself remained here till her death. The country folk say that the devil flew away with her through that cave.'

While the mayor was speaking, Marina rose from her seat and turned her back upon him. His colleagues made signs of stormy disapproval.

Vezza remarked casually,—

'Is that Cæsar's boat? that one over there.'

'Noble times, those!' exclaimed Silla, in his deep voice. All present, except Marina, looked at him with amazement.

'Times of moral strength,' he continued, paying no heed to the glances cast at him.

'Nowadays we have violent scenes and give rein to the impulse of passion—of unbridled and selfish passion. If a woman falls, we kill her or drive her forth. To revenge oneself, to make oneself free. That is our aim. In former times it was otherwise. Then you might find a gentleman capable of burying himself in a wilderness with the woman who had injured him, sharing the expiation though he had not shared the sin, and breaking with all worldly ties out of respect for a bond, painful indeed, but sacred.'

Marina, without turning round, nervously stripped the leaves from a twig she held in her hand.

'It may have been a hideous form of revenge,' re-

marked Finotti, 'a slow form of legal homicide. How can you tell?'

'I do not know the details; I am confident that the father of Count Cæsar would be incapable of what you describe. Moreover, the penalty excites our interest and our pity; but the offence? Who was this woman? Who can tell us that?'

Donna Marina turned upon him.

'And you?' she cried in a voice broken with passion. 'Who are you? Who can even tell us your real name? We have to guess!'

She flung open the door leading to the west wing of the castle, and disappeared.

Medusa herself could hardly have turned a group of men to stone more effectually.

Silla felt that he must say something, but the words failed him. It seemed to him as though he had received a heavy blow on the head from a bludgeon, and was reeling under it. At length, with an effort, he collected himself.

'Gentlemen,' said he, 'I feel that an insult has been hurled at me; but the nature of it I do not understand.'

His tone, his bearing, his eyes expressed what his words did not: 'If you understand, tell me.'

The commendatori and the doctor protested in silence, by gestures, that they knew nothing. The others stood open-mouthed.

Steinegge drew Silla's arm through his and led him away, saying, 'Now you know her, now you know her.'

The municipal councillors of R——, and the doctor, lost no time in retiring.

'A pretty finale,' remarked Vezza, when the first shock of surprise had passed away.

'Did you understand?'

'I should think so,' replied Finotti. 'It's as clear as water.'

'Muddy water.'

'Nonsense! Do you want me to tell you? That young man there, who suddenly appeared at the castle like a man fallen from the clouds, is a peccadillo of the Count's. His presence here has been a severe trial to the young lady. That one can understand. Fancy seeing one's uncle being led away from one beneath one's eyes! The only thing to put things right would be the usual matrimonial scheme, and this I would wager was Cæsar's idea, but whether it be at Paris, or at Milan, or in the country of the moon, a "but" always turns up in the form of an impossible ideal. He may be fair, he may be dark, he may be anything you please; but he's there. And so the scheme is rejected; war to the knife! You understand?'

'You know nothing whatever about it, my dear fellow. Can one venture on a cigar here, do you think?' And Vezza amused himself by lighting a cigar, over which he wasted half a dozen matches.

'Yes, Mina Pernitti Silla, a beautiful woman, a *most* beautiful woman, was, it is true, a friend of Cæsar's, but a friend—!'

The commendatore sent up a puff of smoke, following its course with his eyes while his right hand traced hieroglyphics in the air.

'She was the daughter,' he continued, 'of a judge of the Court of Appeal of Tyrol. You know, I suppose, that Cæsar was expelled from Lombardy in 1831? I fancy he wanted to liberate Italy in order to be in a better position to marry the blonde Tyrolese. She was then about two-and-twenty. Her father would have killed her

rather than give her to a Liberal. Poor girl, she remained firm, and kept her resolve not to marry, until she was twenty-six. Her father was fierce as a mastiff, and I believe ill-treated her. One fine day she gave way and accepted a vile cur of an Austrian, who made money in trade and then squandered it all on himself. He went away with the Germans in 1859, and must have died at Leybach. Mina and Cæsar never met again, but they corresponded frequently, not about love, not the least allusion to it.

'He is a Jansenist who does not go to Mass.

'She used to write to him about her boy, and to ask his advice. She died in 1858, and I learned all this later from a friend of hers. I put it to you whether all this is sufficiently clear. What, I ask you, has the Marchesina di Malombra to fear, and what reasons had she—'

'Yes, yes, it is true enough, no doubt. What it means is that she does not understand the affair in this light. Besides, what is the use of thinking to find reasons inside such a pretty little head? Great heavens! don't you see what eyes she has? All reason and all folly are centred there. Why, to be loved for one hour by a woman so beautiful and so insolent would make one mad with joy.'

'I don't admire her,' said the man of letters; 'she is too thin.'

The honourable deputy refuted this criticism with such scientific arguments that we are compelled to omit them from a work of art.

CHAPTER VIII

OUT IN THE STORM

'SHALL I light the lamp?' said Steinegge, in a low voice.

It was late at night. For a long time Steinegge and Silla had been sitting in the latter's room facing one another without speaking. It was as though they were watching in a chamber of death.

Steinegge rose, silently lighted a candle, and sat down again.

Silla was sitting with his arms crossed, his head resting on his breast, his eyes fixed on the ground. Steinegge was ill at ease; he looked at Silla, looked at the candle, looked at the ceiling, threw one leg over the other and then hastily removed it to its former position.

'It will soon be time to go downstairs,' he remarked. 'I fancy the Count has been back some time.'

Silla made no reply.

Steinegge waited for a minute, then rose, took up the candle and went slowly towards the door.

His companion did not stir.

Steinegge looked at him, uttered an 'ah!' of acquiescence, put down the light and planted himself in front of him. 'I am a stupid fellow, and the words don't come when I want them, but I am your friend. I swear to

you that if I could take your place and relieve you of the poniard thrust that has struck your heart, I would gladly do so to see you happy again.'

Silla rose and grasped both his hands.

Steinegge, growing red with embarrassment, said, 'Oh, no—Signor Silla—I thank you—' and slowly released his hands. Misfortune, misery, the bitterness of life had humbled him to the extent of rendering him shy of any familiarity on the part of those to whom he attributed a higher social position than his own.

'One requires a little philosophy,' he said. 'One ought to despise this woman. Do you think that she has not insulted me ten, ay, twenty times? Don't you remember how she spoke to me this evening as though I were a servant? I despised her for it. She has no heart, not the least bit of one. You Italians say that she is an honest woman, because she does not throw away her self-respect, but I declare that this creature, this creature (Steinegge hissed out the words with fury) is a low woman. She insults me because I am poor, she insults you from the lust of gold.'

'From lust of gold?'

'Yes. She imagines that the Count wishes to disinherit her in your favour.'

Silla covered his face with his hands.

'You mean,' he said, 'she really wished to say—'

'Quite so.'

'But I don't understand,' cried Silla.

'Ah! Everyone here said the same thing.'

'Everyone here?'

After a long silence Silla walked slowly up to Steinegge, laid his hands on his shoulders, and said, in a sad, calm voice,—

'And do you believe that if there were a blot upon

the most sacred of my memories that I should have stayed here to testify to it?'

'I never believed that story. The Count would never have asked you here. I know the Count very well.'

'Steinegge,' rejoined Silla, 'if we part now never to meet again, as may happen, think of me as a man, not persecuted indeed, as you are, but mocked at, continually, bitterly mocked at by one who has left this world, and who takes pleasure in seeing me suffering and struggling; as boys do with a butterfly which they have thrown into the water with its wings crushed. I was born with a warm heart, and neither the power nor the art to make myself beloved, with a spirit thirsting for renown, and neither the power nor the skill to acquire it. I was born rich, and as a young man, just when I began to appreciate the advantages of my position, I was plunged into poverty. Only recently I have been promised quiet and work and friendship, the very things that my heart desires, for ambition I have renounced; and now I am robbed of all three at one blow. My mother was a saint whom I adored, and I am the cause of her memory being insulted; I, who never thought such a calumny could exist, because I am hopelessly inexperienced and know nothing of the world. To express the matter in two words, I am unfit to live, and every day convinces me more strongly of the fact. Unfortunately, I have an iron constitution! I tell you these things, my dear Steinegge, because I am fond of you, and I want you to think of me when I am gone. It is the first time that I have spoken of them to anybody. Tell me, doesn't the whole thing seem a mockery? And yet,' and here Silla's eyes sparkled and his voice quivered, 'it is not so. I have within me the

force to bear up against any disappointment and any affliction; and this force is natural to me, not acquired. I shall make use of it, in fighting the battle of life, in fighting with myself, in fighting against the terrible despondency that from time to time assails me; and I am convinced that God will make use of me for some—'

There was a knock at the door.

The Count sent his compliments to Silla and hoped he would join the company downstairs. Silla, in turn, begged Steinegge to go in his stead, and to make his excuses on the ground of urgent correspondence requiring immediate attention

Steinegge went out, lost in thought. What in the world did Signor Silla intend to do?

The same question was actively discussed at great length in the lower regions of the castle. Mademoiselle Fanny had, in the first place, informed her fellow domestics of the 'fine lesson' which her ladyship had given 'the little snob in the black coat,' who had committed the grave offence, in Fanny's eyes, of failing to notice that these were beautiful. The cook had heard a good deal from the municipal councillors, with some of whom he had drunk a pint, after the scene on the terrace, at hump-backed Cecchina's. He now related how Silla had turned pale as a ghost and had become all of a tremble.

'Who knows, Paolo,' remarked Fanny, 'who knows what will happen if those two find themselves alone together. Why, her ladyship does not know what fear is!'

Hereupon someone stated that Signor Silla had retired for the evening to his room, and that 'the German,' who had been with him for a time, had come out much agitated. Another significant fact was that Silla had

sent for his razors, which the gardener was to have taken to Como to be set.

'I shouldn't be surprised,' said Fanny, 'if the idiot were to put an end to himself without giving a halfpenny in tips.'

'Hush! Let us be going!' replied Giovanna. 'If the master were to know about the things we are saying! Especially your last remark!'

'It's no affair of mine,' rejoined Fanny. 'I wouldn't condescend to even sew on a button for him. I have seen his beggarly outfit. Why, the old doctor is a smarter man than he!' As she mentioned the doctor, Fanny gave a little laugh.

'Poor old doctor,' said she, and then another little laugh, then another, then another; and she refused to say what set her laughing. In the drawing-room also the thoughts of the assembled guests were occupied with Silla and his future. Nobody mentioned the subject, because Donna Marina was present, and the Count knew nothing of what had taken place. The latter indeed was puzzled as to how there could be urgent letters to write twelve hours before post time, but he held his tongue. Marina was in high spirits. Her voice was soft and musical, but in the silvery laugh which frequently rang out could be heard a note of triumph, like the little bell of a hobgoblin lurking in a forest glade. From time to time she and Fanny laughed together from no apparent cause. They laughed heartily when the doctor went away. In fact Marina did not seem to care a jot for Silla's absence.

The hours passed and the moon gradually rose behind the big clouds lying banked up in the east, which gradually broke up and formed a silvery fringe around the queen of night, and then again reformed. In the brief

interval she flashed upon the windows of Silla's chamber, and scanned it through and through.

He was writing. The sound of his pen passing rapidly across the paper was interrupted by passionate monologues, and by rarer intervals of silence. Page followed upon page. His pen must have covered a dozen of them before it stopped. Silla reread what he had written, and then began to reflect.

'No,' he said, and tore up the manuscript. He took another sheet of paper. This time his pen no longer flowed easily. His thoughts were not in harmony with the expression of them. Half-past eleven struck. Silla opened the window and called to Steinegge. He had heard him walking about.

'Come down at once,' he said

Steinegge hurried to the window, and in the first generous impulse seemed about to jump down into the balcony below. Then he disappeared, and in less than no time was in Silla's room with his frock-coat huddled on anyhow, and without his trousers. At that moment it struck neither him nor Silla that his appearance was ridiculous.

Silla went up to him.

'I am going away,' he said.

'Going away? When?'

'Now.'

'Now?'

'Do you think I could pass another night beneath this roof?'

Steinegge made no reply.

'I am going on foot to—— where I shall await the early train to Milan. Will you be so good as to hand this letter to the Count? And here is a small sum of money which I will ask you to distribute, at your discretion,

among the servants. I have luckily not had my books sent here; but I am leaving a box behind me. Will you be so good as to send it after me?'

Steinegge nodded his head; but he was unable to speak. He had a choking sensation at the throat.

'Thank you. When you have sent it off, kindly let me know by a letter addressed Post Restante, Milan, and put the key inside. I leave the key because there are still some odds and ends of mine not packed up.'

'But do you really mean that you are going like this?'

'I really mean that I am going like this. What do you think I have told the Count? I have told him that my views and his are so antagonistic that I cannot collaborate with him; and that, in order to avoid painful explanations and the risk of yielding to persuasion, I am going away in this fashion, begging him to forgive me and to accept my lasting gratitude. A letter courteous in form and mean in character, a letter which will irritate him and set him against me. As for her, I don't condescend to attack her. I wrote to her, and then tore the letter up. She will understand that I have given her my answer by snapping asunder the ties which gave her a pretext to insult me. The others, I think, will understand also.'

'Through this woman,' growled Steinegge, clenching his fists.

'But you do not know the worst,' murmured Silla. You don't know what a vile thing I am. I will tell you. The mere thought of pressing that woman's cheek with my lips sends a cold shiver through me, makes my brain reel. Is that love? I know not, I think not; but it would go hard with me if I had not that within me which suffices to crush out my ignominious resentment

at being hated by her. Yes, that is how things stand. You look amazed and I am not surprised. Still, I am man enough to stir my cowardly self into action and to make it obey me. I am going away. Shake hands; nay more, embrace me.'

Steinegge could only utter three stifled 'Ohs.' He embraced Silla with a severe frown, and the expansive affection of a father. He then produced a shabby old cigar-case, and offered it with both hands to his friend. The later looked at it in astonishment.

'Give me yours,' said Steinegge.

Silla produced a case even older and shabbier than the first one. They exchanged them in silence. Before he left, Silla thought passionately of his mother; it seemed to him that the angel above her bed was praying for him, and invoking Heaven's guidance in the dark path that lay before him.

A window on the ground floor gave him access to the courtyard. He would not permit Steinegge to go with him, but pressed his hand, and having crossed the treacherous gravel on tip-toe, slowly ascended the stone steps between the cypresses, halting in the deep slanting shadows which broke with their heavy outlines the shining surface of the moon-lit stones.

Then he turned round to look at the severe outline of the ancient castle, which he was leaving, in all human probability, for ever. He listened to the sad murmur of the fountain in the courtyard, to the solemn voice of the deep bubbling spring above him. Both voices called to him, the former more feverishly, the latter more eloquently. From where he stood he could not see her window, but he looked down on the angle of the roof beneath which the unknown chamber lay, and his imagination summoned up its minutest details with the rapidity and the intense

energy of passion. He breathed the warm, scented air, saw the moonbeams dart through the eastern lattice and flood the floor with light, then touch a shining mass of rich garments in disarray, shimmer above a gold hairpin fallen to the ground, above the brown pointed toes of a little curved shoe, glide on to the white couch, kiss a delicate hand and expire in feeble flashes of light along the fine moulded arm. At this point the picture became clouded over, a nervous paroxysm shook his frame, and, as though to escape from it, he hastily resumed his way.

It is not to be marvelled that he missed it. In good sooth it was no easy matter among so many paths, all disappearing amongst the regular rows of vines, to select the one which led to the iron gate. Silla reflected that he was not absolutely certain to find the key, which was usually placed, though not always, in a hole in the boundary wall, and he remembered that he ought to be near to another exit which was sometimes used by the peasants who worked in the vineyards. He came upon it. The boundary wall had fallen into ruins at this point, and from the neighbouring field a mulberry tree spread out its branches across the breach. Silla was quickly on the other side, and but a few paces from a landing-place used by the peasant cultivators scattered along the lake. A gently sloping pathway leads from this point down to a dip in the valley, where it meets the high road, touching in its course the edge of the lake, then hiding away among hedges and low boundary walls, then cutting across some grassy hills, dotted here and there with olive trees.

As he walked along, Silla in vain endeavoured to fix his thoughts on the future, on the life of sacrifice and stern endeavour which awaited him. He cursed the wanton voices of the night and the voluptuous moon now

high in the clear vault of heaven. He rested his burning brow against the stem of an olive tree, without knowing what he was about. The rough cold touch restored him to his senses and self-control, as cold steel might have done.

The lightning began to play, and Silla quickly resumed his journey. In front of him the lowering storm-clouds were moving up from the east, were spreading along the mountains and upwards through the sky, their full crests waving hither and thither like a wild sea that would mount up to the moon itself. The silent flashes of lightning shot out unceasingly towards her pale fugitive light. Suddenly Silla stands still and listens.

He hears the subdued murmur of the lake lapping against the stones, the melancholy hoot of the owl in the copse on the opposite shore, the chirping of the grasshoppers and the soft whisper of the breeze as it stirs the dense foliage of the vines and the silver-grey leaves of the olives.

Nothing else?

Yes, the sound of two oars cutting the water with long, cautious strokes. Whether near at hand or far off it is not easy to say; on the lake, at that hour, it needs an expert to judge the distances of sounds.

The sound of oars ceases.

It is followed by the harsh noise of a keel grating upon the flints along the shore. Even the grasshoppers are listening. Then all is silence. The grasshoppers renew their chirping, joining it to the cry of the distant owl and the murmur of the lake lapping against the stones. Silla pushed forwards. The path quickly led down to the sandy shore of a little bay, at the other end of which large black masses of stone stood out above the water. Above them, among the wild fig trees and briars, rose a little

chapel, and at the foot of the chapel stood out the fine black lines of a boat. There must then be a passage between the rocks. There was no other boat but the *Dart* upon the lake, and Silla knew this. But who had come in the *Dart*?

He thought of Rico and stood still in order to avoid discovery. He saw a shadowy form rise up among the shrubs behind the chapel, run down the hill and disappear. A moment later one heard a silvery little laugh. It was impossible not to recognise it. Donna Marina! Silla instinctively rushed forwards, heard a cry of terror, saw the vanishing form re-appear at the chapel and then seek refuge among the shrubs, the while Donna Marina was vainly calling, 'Doctor, doctor.' Silla recognised the doctor but did not wait to consider, even for an instant, how he came to be there. He heard the grating of the keel as it pushed off from the shore, and ran up to the chapel just as the boat was quietly passing out of the channel between the rocks, and Marina, putting down the oar with which she had been polling it, was engaged in readjusting her gloves. 'Stop!' cried Silla from the highest point of one of the rocks.

Marina uttered a cry and seized both oars.

It was impossible to allow her to leave in this manner. At the foot of the rock there were only a few inches of water. Silla jumped down and caught hold of the boat's chain. Marina made two desperate strokes, but the *Dart* soon swung round in obedience to the iron hand which held her.

'You must listen to me now,' said the young man.

'You will tell me first,' replied Marina, 'whether the noble part which you have played to-night is one of your ordinary pastimes, or whether you are acting under my uncle's orders.'

'You must have lived among queer people, Marchesina. Are these the traits of noble birth? In that case I assure you that my own origin is the more noble; and I have some reason to hope that my name will be honourably remembered when yours is forgotten.'

Jumping on to a jutting rock, his hat off, Silla commanded the boat and the agitated woman in it.

Marina fought for liberty, and beat the water furiously with one oar.

'Let us proceed to the second act,' she cried. 'In the meanwhile, you are a coward to keep me here by force.'

Silla let go the chain. 'You can go,' he cried, 'you can go if you have the heart to do so. Only please understand that I am playing no comedy, only an obscure melodrama, the second act of which does not interest you.'

'And the first one does?' rejoined Marina, dropping the oars and crossing her arms.

'The second act,' Silla continued, without noticing the interruption, 'does not take place here. Rest assured on that point. From this evening onwards, you will see neither the drama nor the hero of it. If, in the ingenuousness of your heart you have suspected me to be more than a mere friend to your uncle, you can set your mind at rest. Perhaps I am not even a friend now; for but a few minutes since I have, like a malefactor, secretly left his hospitable roof under which, in some low corner, this vile calumny had its being. If, however, you feared,' and here Silla's voice trembled, 'if you feared some sinister design in connection with Donna Marina and Corrado Silla you have been grievously misinformed. If the Count had mentioned the subject to me I should have quickly disillusioned him. For the woman I should

adore would be one capable of despising wealth and rank. And now, Marchesina, I wish you—'

'One word,' cried Marina, urging the boat nearer with two strokes of the oar, for a sudden breeze was gradually driving her into the open. 'Your fantastic melodrama won't go down. You are good enough to cast yourself for an heroic part. So far so good; but then come the critics, Signor Silla. Now, where did you discover, for example, that I am a suspicious heiress? Very ridiculous, you know. Did you never notice how much attention I pay my uncle? And how dare you speak of designs upon my person? Do you imagine I should trouble my head about anything that you and my uncle might foolishly think or say?'

Meanwhile, the *Dart* was again making for the open before the freshening breeze. Marina gave another stroke and turned round towards Silla. The boat made way for a moment against the wind, against the waves now running strong beneath the keel, and then suddenly turned over, driven on to its left side. The light of the moon was rapidly failing. Swift fleecy clouds like flecks of foam had come up to it, had overpassed it; now the big storm clouds caught it up and the moon was lost in the great bank, and seemed like a struggling beacon on the point of going out.

'Then,' cried Silla, 'why—'

The rest of the words were lost in the sudden hubbub of the waves. A violent squall threw the *Dart* on to the rock on which he stood.

'Get on shore,' he cried as he bent down and caught hold of the gunwale of the boat to prevent her being dashed against the rock. 'Quick.'

'No, shove off! I am going home.'

Although they were so near as to be able to touch one

another, it was with difficulty that they could make each other hear. The waves, increased suddenly in size to an extraordinary extent, thundered upon the beach with a deafening crash; the helm, the chain, the oars of the boat, as it rocked wildly hither and thither, creaked and groaned. Silla got a foothold in the bow, pushed off from the rock with one desperate shove and fell into the bottom of the boat.

'Take the helm,' he shouted, seizing the two oars. 'Out into the open against the wind.' Marina obeyed the orders, sitting opposite to him tightly grasping the tiller-ropes.

The sky was now as black as pitch, and nothing could be seen. One could hear the waves dashing upon the rocks and on to the stony beach. Here was where the danger lay. The *Dart*, urged forward too vigorously, rose at the bow above the waves and then splashed down into them with a dull, heavy thud; it passed through the tallest waves like a knife, and then the foaming crests passed over it, running along the boat from stem to stern. The first time this happened, Marina, at the sound of the rushing water, hastily raised her feet and rested them on Silla's. At the same moment a blinding flash of lightning shot across the sky, lighting up vividly the greyish white lake and the big mountains, on which each stone and plant stood out in the searching glare. There flashed before Silla the apparition of Marina, with her hair floating in the gale and her eyes fixed on his. It was already dark again as he felt his heart beating with the recollection of that sight. And the little feet were pressing his; pressing harder as the boat rose in the air, then slipping away and again pressing against his. The two oars broke to pieces in his hands. He got out the other two from the bottom of the boat and rowed furiously, because

CHAPTER IX

THE LETTER BAG

From Donna Marina di Malombra *to* Signora Giulia de Bella.

'*2d September* 1864.

I have discovered the name of the author of I want to know for certain, and also to find I give you my word that it is not with and call on him! Let loose, I beg of you, and henchmen in pursuit. With a to be able to find out everything at

MARINA.'

'Your maid is waiting

'Yes!'

Bella *to* Donna Marina

'In that case we will go back

minutes the lake will be quite calm

there.'

SE, *4th September.*

'No,' she replied, 'Fanny is not waiting my courtiers is asleep.'

She turned the *Dart's* head towards the ago. I Neither of the two spoke another word. When the reached the castle it was not so dark, and the wind had died away, but the waves were still thundering against the walls, so as to drown all sound of the boat's passage through the water.

Silla began to feel more calm They passed by the

another, it was with difficulty that they could make each other hear. The waves, increased suddenly in size to an extraordinary extent, thundered upon the beach with a deafening crash; the helm, the chain, the oars of the boat, as it rocked wildly hither and thither, creaked and groaned. Silla got a foothold in the bow, pushed off from the rock with one desperate shove and fell into the bottom of the boat.

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Marina remained motionless, with her arms stretched out before her.

It was no dream, it was no illusion, there was no room for doubt; Silla had whispered 'Cecilia.'

CHAPTER IX

THE LETTER BAG

From Donna Marina di Malombra *to* Signora Giulia de Bella.

'*2d September* 1864.

'I FANCY I have discovered the name of the author of *A Dream*. I want to know for certain, and also to find out his address. I give you my word that it is not with a view to go and call on him! Let loose, I beg of you, all your courtiers and henchmen in pursuit. With a little tact, one ought to be able to find out everything at V—— & Co.'s, the Printers. MARINA.'

From Signora Giulia de Bella *to* Donna Marina di Malombra.

'VARESE, *4th September*.

'So he has made an impression! All my courtiers have gone into the country, and yesterday somebody told me that V—— & Co. closed their doors a month ago. I should be inclined to advise you to turn over a new leaf. But if I hear anything I promise to let you know.

'GIULIA.'

PART II

THE RED AND BLACK FAN

CHAPTER I

NEWS FROM NASSAU

On the 6th of September the castle was in a state of expectation. The sparse blades of grass which timidly peeped up here and there through the red gravel in the court had all disappeared. A grand array of large pots drawn up in lines displayed a noble show of flowers and foliage plants; they reminded one of state dignitaries and dames awaiting a royal procession. The common crowd, the jessamines and other creepers covering the walls, looked down with a thousand eyes upon the scene.

For the present, Steinegge, elegantly attired, walked alone, with much dignity, amid the respectful and expectant crowd, occasionally stopping to see whether anyone had appeared on the staircase, and then exchanging a word or two through the barred windows of the kitchen in the basement with Paolo, who could be seen passing backwards and forwards from one small stove to another, behind the bars, like a big, white bear.

Steinegge looked at the clock. It was half-past one. The Count had said that he would return from the station with the Salvadors about that time. Steinegge,

with a respectful expression on his face, began to ascend the steps.

They had arrived. For there was the Count's broad-brimmed hat, which almost covered his servant as well as himself. But the Countess Fosca? and Count Nepo?

Nobody had arrived by the train from Milan. Count Cæsar, in a violent rage with his cousin Fosca, his cousin Nepo, with all the cousins in the world, took occasion to scold the cook, ordered the guests' rooms to be dismantled, and flew into a temper with Steinegge for coming to meet him and with Marina for stopping away. During these diatribes, the *Dart* was far away on the lake, shining in the sun and hurrying its course not a bit. It pleased the Count to let off steam in this fashion. Half an hour later he cheered up the dismayed Steinegge with a few kindly words, and countermanded the orders given *ab irato* to Giovanna. With Marina things took a different course. Five days had passed since the unexpected departure of Silla, and the Count and his niece had not spoken a word to each other. He had been on the point of starting for Milan; then, changing his mind, possibly on account of the Salvadors' visit, he had written to Silla instead. The arrival of his guests had given him a great deal to do. He had even accomplished the miracle of going to the station to meet them. Giovanna began to think that the Venetian lady and gentleman must be people of more importance than the King, and the other servants told the gardener that he need not water the flowers, for the clouds were certain to fall in before night.

Marina, during the first four days after Silla's departure, did not put in an appearance, not even at

meals. Fanny informed the Count that her ladyship was suffering from severe nervous headaches; to the others she confided that her mistress was in a terrible state of mind, that one could do nothing with her, and that there were moments when even she could stand it no longer.

On the day in question, Marina went out in the *Dart*, and appeared at dinner as the Count and Steinegge were discoursing about Gneist's work on 'Self-Government,' of which Steinegge was preparing a *précis*. The Count went on talking without turning his head, ignoring the fact that his *vis-à-vis* had risen to his feet and made a profound bow in the direction of the door. It was only as they left the table when dinner was over that he remarked to Marina, with unwonted calmness,—

'You will do me the favour of coming to my study in an hour's time.'

Marina looked at him for a moment as though surprised, then answered with an ironical inflection on the words,—

'I will do you the favour.'

She waited nearly an hour and a half, then she sent Fanny to see whether the Count was in the library. The answer was that he had been expecting her there for the last half-hour.

She entered the library, walking slowly, with the air of one whose mind is wool-gathering, strolled half round the room towards the door leading to the garden, and finally sank into an arm-chair facing the enemy.

'I must warn you, in the first place,' began the Count, 'that those who do me the honour of living under my roof have to treat me with civility. My house is not a prison; forget yourself once too often, and you will have to pay the penalty, for I have the weakness of demand-

ing, sooner or later, what is owing to me. If you do not know the coin in which my debtors have to pay me, I shall be happy to give you a lesson.'

Marina's eyes flashed and her lips moved.

'Do not answer me,' thundered the Count.

She sprang to her feet. She wished to oppose him, to speak, and she was unable to do so. Perhaps too great a flow of words choked her utterance; perhaps, in the moment of breaking out, she feared to disclose the secret which, in a confused way, she felt must be kept sacred, against a pre-determined day and hour fixed by her will and fate.

'Do not answer me,' the Count repeated. 'You hate me and my house, but it would hardly suit your convenience to be asked to leave it at twenty-four hours' notice. Do not answer me.'

Marina resumed her seat in silence.

'You can hardly imagine that I am ignorant of the gross insult inflicted by you upon my friend Silla, who has left the house in consequence, and you cannot suppose that, knowing of it, I do not resent it. I do not know whether human speech is capable of expressing the feelings with which your action inspires me. Let it pass, I will not inquire into the secret motives of your conduct. But one thing is clear, we cannot go on living together indefinitely. There is an idiotic phrase, "the ties of blood." I do not imagine that your blood and mine has two globules in common. Be that as it may, it is not necessary to tie oneself hand and foot with these ties. Far better to cut them asunder. You did not condescend to be at home to-day when my cousins, the Salvadors, were expected. But I may inform you that my cousin is a nobleman of name and wealth, and that he contemplates getting married.

'Ah!' said Marina, and she smiled as she looked at the little white hand which was playing with the arm of the chair.

'Don't make melodramatic exclamations. Don't get into your head that anybody wishes to force him upon you. I do not know whether my cousin will admire the colour of your eyes, or whether the sound of his voice will touch your heart. Situated as you are, it may be of use to you to be aware of his intentions. You can take advantage of them or not, as you may deem best.'

'Thanks. And if I don't take a fancy to his lordship, when am I to leave?'

Marina had spoken very softly, looking at the rings on her open hand one after the other; then she clenched her hand and raised it towards her face as though she wished to count the blue veins; then, finally, let it fall and raised two innocent eyes towards the Count.'

'But,' said he, 'when *am* I to leave? It appears to me that it is you who, by your conduct, display a desire to go away. It would, perhaps, be more honest and straightforward if you were to say, When can I go?'

'No, for I can go when I please. I am of age, and my means are sufficient to maintain me and an old lady-companion, who will leave me to myself. When am I to leave? I have no desire to go away.'

The Count looked at her in amazement. Those large limpid eyes disclosed nothing, absolutely nothing. They awaited a reply.

'You do not wish to go away? Then you wish that I should, eh? That would suit your views? But, in Heaven's name, speak out. If you do not wish to go away, what on earth do you wish? Why do you com-

port yourself towards me as though I were your gaoler? What harm have I done you?'

'You? Nothing.'

'Who then? Steinegge? What has Steinegge done?'

'He has frightened me.'

'How do you mean frightened you?'

'He is so ugly.'

The Count sat bolt upright in his chair, grasping the two arms violently, and turning towards his niece a knitted brow and flashing eyes.

'Oh,' said he, 'if you think to jest with me you make a mistake; if your mind is bent on folly you choose the moment ill. When I am good enough to inquire what you have to find fault with in my house, it is not for you to answer me like a French *folie-bergère*, but to discuss the matter with decorum and in seriousness.'

'What is the use, if you are resolved that I am to go?'

'Who ever said that? I said that we are not suited to live together, and I indicated a possible method of changing your abode and your companion. Above all, I made you understand that in future you must treat me and my guests with civility, if you did not wish to force me to take decisive measures.'

Marina had not yet replied when Giovanna entered, greatly agitated.

'My lord, the lady and gentleman have come.'

'Great heavens!' cried the Count, and jumping up he hastily left the room.

Marina proceeded to transfer herself to the empty arm-chair, and she lolled about in it with her arms crossed, her head thrown back, one leg thrown over the other, and the shining tip of a little black shoe darted into the air like a defiance.

Downstairs could be heard many voices, or rather one voice, that flowed on for ever, resonant, penetrating, and accompanied by other voices, some of them strange to Marina, and by short laughs expressing respectful assent.

'Oh, what a journey!' said the voice. 'Oh, what a country! Oh, what people! Have you my purse, Momolo? I will tell you all about it, my dear creatures. Ah, who are you, my pretty girl? Her ladyship's maid. Excellent! Bravo! And where is our beloved Cæsar? Still taking the air at this hour of the day? Tell me, pet, what is your name? Fanny. Well, Fanny, is that white stick of a man over there a monk or a cook? For the sake of heaven let him make us some soup. You are tired, Nepo, my son? Goodness gracious! why, there is Cæsar. How old he is, how ugly!' Muttering the last words as she covered her face with her hands, Countess Fosca Salvador greeted Count Cæsar, who came hurriedly to meet her, with a face that endeavoured, but failed, to express hilarity. Worse still was it when the Countess endeavoured to kiss him, and nearly suffocated him in her voluble embrace. The old gentleman nearly lost his head. He continued to answer, 'Yes, yes, yes,' in his deepest bass notes, shook Nepo by the hand, and was on the point of doing the same to the Countess's old man-servant, in spite of the latter's low bows and his repeated, 'Excellency, Excellency.'

'Well,' cried the Countess, 'wait and see old Momolo kiss me. Unless you wish to; but you are an old bear.'

Count Cæsar was on tenter-hooks. He would willingly have sent the whole company to the right about. The Countess's remarks infuriated him. Momolo, and the two maid servants who stood in silence behind her

Excellency, he regarded with marked disfavour. If he could only have looked into the court and seen, among the flower-beds, the great heap of boxes, bags and trunks.

'It is an invasion, my dear Count, an invasion,' remarked Nepo, as he walked round the hall, almost feeling his way, being short-sighted, and putting his nose into every corner to find room for his stick, overcoat and hat. 'I really told my mother that it was an abuse of—'

'True, he did say so, and I replied, "Never mind, let us abuse it. What will come of it? Is not my cousin a true Cæsar?" If I had known that it was such a Sabbath day's journey, I must confess I should not have come. My dear boy, you remember what you said to me this morning, don't you?'

'Well, well,' said the Count, who could stand no more chatter. 'We can hear all about that later on. In the meantime, let me show you upstairs.'

'I will come, dear cousin, if I can face the climb. I recommend to you my dear Momolo and Catte. They are old, poor dears, with one foot in the grave. But I should like to have them with me. *Apropos*, Catte, where is that girl? Haven't you noticed, cousin Bear, the pretty stranger I've brought you?'

The young girl dressed in black who stood behind old Catte was not, then, a second maid. No, she was waiting for the first storm of meeting to quiet down. Now she stepped forward and addressed the Count in good Italian, though with a strong foreign accent.

'May I ask you, sir, to inform me whether Captain Andreas Steinegge lives here?'

Her voice was melodious, soft and clear.

'Certainly, my dear young lady,' replied the Count in astonishment. 'My good friend Steinegge lives here;

though he is not in the habit of calling himself Captain.'

'He was a captain in the Lichtenstein Hussars, an Austrian regiment.'

'I do not doubt it for a moment, and, indeed, I seem to remember that Signor Steinegge once mentioned the fact to me. And you desire to see him?'

The young girl's clear voice seemed to fail her, and subsided into a whisper.

'Eh?' said the Count again, in a kindly tone.

'Yes, sir.'

'He is out just now, but will be back very shortly. Will you kindly walk upstairs and await his return?'

'Thank you. Will he come in by this door?'

'Yes.'

'Then, with your kind permission, I will await him here.'

The Count bowed, ordered a lamp to be placed in the hall, and went upstairs with his guests. The Countess Fosca informed him that the young lady downstairs had arrived by the same train as themselves and, like them, had asked for a fly to take her to the castle. Seeing the poor girl all alone (and at the station there was not even a donkey-cart on hire), the Countess had offered to take her in her carriage if she could manage to get one in such a place, which she did at last, after immense difficulty. 'Who she is and what she wants,' added the Countess, 'I did not gather. Indeed, she said very little, and, shall I tell you a secret? My son maintains that she spoke in Italian, while I thought all along she was talking German. Quite tired out, too! I could see that. What an experience; what a journey.'

The Count said nothing. 'What a hard-hearted brute,' murmured her Excellency to herself. 'And Marina?

Where is that wild girl Marina? Perhaps at supper? I confess myself that—'

At this moment Marina appeared. She embraced the Countess, shook hands with Nepo with careless grace, and then submitted, with a little patient smile, to the flood of compliments which the Countess poured over her, holding both her hands and shaking them warmly, and frequently addressing her as 'my dear girl! my dear, dear girl!'

Meanwhile, his Excellency Nepo was talking with the Count. His Excellency was a young man about thirty, with a fair complexion, a large, aquiline nose, awkwardly flanked by two slight black whiskers, and large prominent black eyes, the whole being set off by curling black hair and a fringe of black beard which looked like a false one on his clear red and white skin. His hands were small and white. He always smiled when speaking. His quick, graceful step, with the arms always hanging straight down, and the high-pitched, rapid utterance, gave him an air of effeminacy which struck one at once on meeting him. At Venice he was known as 'the carpet knight.' Yet he was by no means lacking in talent, or culture, or ambition. He had left Venice in 1860, and had come to Turin to take up politics as a career. He studied Political Economy and Constitutional Law, attended the receptions of the few ministers who entertained, and frequented the chambers and the political *salons* of Piazza Castello. He had some idea of entering the diplomatic service, but had not yet gone up for examination. It was considered certain that, on the liberation of Venice, a district in which he held large estates would return him as its representative in the Chamber. And now, while the unfortunate Marina had to listen to the endless flow of the Countess's chatter, he, on his part, was inflicting upon Count Cæsar a history

of his life, of the course of his studies and the direction of his hopes. The Count, who was a poor hand at dissimulation, was listening to the narrative, lolling in his chair, his chin resting on his breast, his hands in his pockets, and his legs sprawling out before him; every now and then he raised his head and gave the speaker a look, half astonished and half bored.

At length a footman made the welcome announcement that supper was ready; Countess Fosca seized her cousin's arm. Nepo hastened to offer his to Marina, who accepted it with a slight nod, still, however, looking towards the Countess and continuing her conversation with her. Her arm rested on Nepo's with sylph-like lightness; it hardly seemed to touch his; as soon as they entered the dining-room she withdrew it.

Meanwhile, the young girl dressed in black was sitting in the hall, waiting. She appeared not to hear the voices and the footsteps overhead, and to take no notice of the servants who passed backwards and forwards, calling to one another, laughing among themselves, sometimes casting inquisitive, suspicious glances at her. She had placed her portmanteau alongside her, and kept looking at the door.

A step was heard outside on the gravel; Steinegge appeared in the doorway. The girl rose to her feet.

Steinegge looked at her in surprise for an instant and then passed on. The young lady made a step forwards, and said, in a low voice,—

'*Ich bitte.*'

The poor old German, thus taken by surprise, felt his pulse quicken at those two simple words in the familiar accent of Nassau. All he could think of in reply was, '*O, mein Fräulein!*' and with that he held out both his hands.

'Are you,' the girl went on in German, her voice quivering, 'are you Captain Andreas Gotthold Steinegge, of Nassau?'

'Yes, yes.'

'I believe your family used to live there?'

'Yes, they did.'

'I bring news.'

'News? News of my little girl? Oh, my dear young lady!'

He clasped his hands as though before a saint. His eyes sparkled, his lips moved convulsively, his whole person expressed one uncontrollable desire. Countess Fosca had spoken truly when she said that the young lady was tired out. She now turned deadly pale, and as Steinegge anxiously placed his arm about her waist, murmured faintly,—

'It is nothing; some fresh air.'

He carried, rather than accompanied, her out, seated her on a chair, and then, a prey to a thousand fears and dreading to hear from her lips every kind of bad news, possibly the worst of all, he took both her hands in his and spoke in soft, soothing tones to his young, unknown countrywoman, a stranger in a strange land.

His memory brought to him tender expressions used in years gone by, sacred terms of paternal love unused for years, and now invested with a semi-religious character by the respectful form in which they were couched. Was it that, taking courage, she did not hear the formal terms, and heard only, '*Mein Kind*, my child?' Had she ceased to remember the first words they had interchanged, or did his affectionate manner make her believe that her secret was known? She threw her arms round Steinegge's neck and burst into tears.

Incredible as it may seem, Steinegge at first failed to

understand. He had always kept a lively recollection of his little girl as he had left her at eight years old, a slight, little figure with large eyes and long, fair hair. The girl's action and her burst of tears said to him, 'It is she,' but he understood and failed to understand at the same time; he was unable, in so short a time, to grasp so complete a transformation.

'Oh, father!' she said, half tenderly, half reproachfully.

Then for the first time his heart and his intelligence began to act together. With broken, incoherent phrases he knelt at his child's feet, took one of her hands in his and pressed it to his lips. With the infinite happiness which overwhelmed him, he felt also a humble sense of gratitude beyond bounds.

'Edith, darling, darling Edith, my own little girl,' he said in choking tones. 'Are you really Edith? Can it really be you?'

Out of charity to poor Steinegge we will not repeat all the absurd things he said during those first happy moments.

Sudden joy perturbs thought, as some strong sweet liquors perturb clear water.

Edith remained silent. She replied to her father by pressing his big hand passionately with her nervous ones.

A stream of light shone out through an open door.

'Father,' said Edith, suddenly, 'you must introduce me.'

Steinegge got up unwillingly. He would have taken no notice of that impertinent light; he would have remained there all night alone with his child, and he did not see that there was any need to introduce her at once. He did not know, and his loyal nature was in-

capable of imagining, the false, perfidious statements whispered in his daughter's ear about him. Edith had refused to credit them, yet they had left some painful doubts in her mind; she feared at least that in this strange house they might possibly think ill of her father. In truth, she knew the world better than he who had seen so much of it.

They entered the room, the daughter leaning on her father's arm. The inquisitive Fanny stood at the door with a candle in her hand.

'Good evening,' said Edith.

Fanny, who had no high regard for the old German, ventured on a foolish smile when Edith addressed her. But the smile quickly died away, and she replied with a graceful curtsey and said nothing.

'How on earth,' thought she to herself, 'can the old "Deutscher" know a young lady like that?'

She had noticed the refined beauty of the girl's face and the elegance of her figure; had noticed her walk, and the manner of bowing, her soft low voice, the severe simplicity of her dress, and, knowing a lady when she saw one, had formed a favourable opinion of Edith.

'Get out of the way,' said Steinegge.

Fanny looked at him in amazement. Where had he acquired such self-confidence? Usually he hardly ventured to even ask a servant to do anything. Now he seemed to have grown taller, and he walked upright like a soldier with a queen upon his arm. Fanny made way.

Steinegge introduced his daughter without the obsequious humility usual with one who introduces a relation to his social superiors. Count Nepo and Donna Marina were extremely cold. Count Cæsar was cordial. He rose quickly, grasped the young girl's hand with

unaffected warmth, and in his deep voice talked kindly to her of his esteem and friendship for her father. Countess Fosca asked for explanations first from one and then from another, and seemed quite unable to grasp the situation. When she did, 'What a curious thing!' said she, 'what a curious thing!' And she never left off making exclamations of surprise, offering congratulations and asking questions of every kind.

'Why do you sit so far away, my sweet child?' she said to Edith. 'One can't sup off joy, you know, and after supper you will be even fonder of papa than you are now. Come over here, pet, come over here.'

Edith gently excused herself. The Count, guessing that father and child desired to be alone, remarked that probably the traveller required rest above all things, and that some supper could be sent up to her later on if she required it.

Giovanni conducted Edith to her room hard by her father's. The latter kept walking up and down the passage: and went in and out of his room, talking apparently to the walls, the floor, and to the ceiling; now and then stopping to listen to the footsteps and the voices of the two women in the next room with a troubled and anxious expression on his face, as though he feared the sounds would cease and everything prove to be only a dream.

At last Giovanna left the room and went downstairs.

A few minutes later the door opened again and a voice said quietly,—

'Father!'

Steinegge entered the room and kissed his daughter. They could not speak, and regarded one another in silence. She smiled through her tears; he bit his lip, there was an agonised look in his eyes, and his face

twitched convulsively. Edith understood; she laid her head upon his breast and murmured,—

'She is happy now, father.'

Poor Steinegge trembled like a leaf, and made extraordinary efforts to restrain his emotion.

Edith drew from her bosom a little locket, opened it and handed it to her father. The latter would not look at it, and at once returned it to her, saying, 'I know, I know.' For some minutes he remained silent, and then, with a firm step, walked up to the lamp and put it out.

'Now, tell me all about yourself,' he said. 'Excuse me putting out the light. I wish to listen to the sound of your voice, and to forget that so many years have passed. Do you mind?'

No, she did not mind. The picture which her memory had preserved of her father had, with the lapse of time, become more pleasing and more refined, the very opposite, in fact, of the poor man himself. Even Edith found something strange in his appearance to which she had to get accustomed before she could confide in him freely.

In the dark, however, the kindly voice, the tones of which she had so often sought to recall, brought back to her in a flood of memories all the details of her happy childhood. So Edith also was pleased with the idea of talking in the dark.

She told him about the twelve years passed with her maternal grandfather and two married uncles. The grandfather, who had died a short time since, had been good enough to her, but had absolutely forbidden her ever to mention her exiled father's name. Edith spoke of these years with tact and delicacy, excusing, as far as might be, the deep-rooted antipathies of the old man,

which none of his family had ever taken the trouble to combat. Steinegge did not interrupt her once; he was anxious to hear the final portion of her narrative, to learn how Edith, after leaving all his letters unanswered, had, after all, decided to abandon country and friends and go in search of him. This part of her story was the most difficult and the most painful to tell. Up to the time of her grandfather's death she had not received a single letter from her father. When her grandfather died, she came across one addressed to her from Turin, from which she learned that, up to two years before, many other letters to her had come from various parts of the world, and that all had been suppressed and destroyed.

Here her narrative was interrupted by an outburst on the part of Steinegge against the bigots, hypocrites and rogues who had stabbed him in the dark like assassins. He stormed, fuming up and down the dark room, and only came to a standstill after knocking over a couple of chairs. Then he heard a light footstep approach him, and felt a small hand on his lips. All his wrath died away. He kissed the little hand and took it in both his own.

'You are right,' said he, 'but it is horrible.'

'No, it is low. Much too low for us to notice.'

And then she went on to tell how that letter, two years and a half old, had almost sent her out of her mind. She knew it by heart. She now repeated the supplication she had addressed to her uncles to produce some of the other letters from her father. But all had disappeared, and not one could be recovered. On their part they proceeded to sever the slender bonds which, after the death of her grandfather, had kept Edith in her mother's family. Her patrimony was small. The inheritance had to be shared among many heirs, and the

family had always lived in great style, and, if anything, beyond its means. Edith asked for her modest portion, and her relations gave it to her on unjust conditions, which she, however, accepted without a word. She at once started for Italy alone, with her little fortune of six thousand thalers and a letter of introduction to an *attaché* of the Prussian Legation at Turin, who placed his services at the disposal of natives of Nassau also. This gentleman was of great assistance to her, and soon put her on the right road to find her father. Edith concluded her story by telling how she had met the Salvadors.

This made Steinegge remark that perhaps it was his duty to go down to the drawing-room before the company retired for the night. He lighted the lamp for Edith, and asked her to wait for him, as he would be back in a few minutes. He went hastily downstairs without observing that the lamp on the landing was out, and that the only sound to be heard was the ticking of the clock. As Steinegge passed by there was a whirring sound, and the great clock struck one. It seemed to call 'halt.' Steinegge stood still and lighted a match. The match went out, and Steinegge stood there with his hand in mid air. Was it possible? He thought it was half-past nine. He went upstairs again on tip-toe, and very gently opened the door of Edith's room.

She was standing before the open window, her hands resting on the back of a chair, her head bowed.

Steinegge stood still; his breath came with difficulty. Was it jealousy of the Invisible One beyond the stars to whom his daughter was addressing her devotions? He did not know himself, he could not analyse his feelings. A cold shadow seemed to have passed between him and Edith. In his own mind he had never been able to dis-

tinguish God from the Priests, of whom he ever spoke with contempt, although incapable of the least discourtesy to the most ignorant and bigoted cleric in christendom. It had often pained him to reflect that his daughter had been educated by priests; and now the mere fact of finding her at prayer made him think that she would love him less, and discouraged him in regard to the future.

Edith noticed his entrance and put aside the chair, saying,—

'Come in, father.'

'I disturb you?'

She was surprised at the sad, submissive tone of the question, and replied in astonishment in the negative, raising her eyebrows as though to say, 'Why do you ask me that?' She wished him to stand beside her at the window.

It was a peaceful night. There was no moon. Mountains and lake were indistinguishable one from the other. A faint white line could be seen far below; it was the avenue which went pass the hot-house and along the lake. The rest was a confused mist encircled by a grey sky. From the mist rose the soft, placid murmur of the lake, now and then broken by the splash of a fish, over which the waters again closed and resumed their slumberous lullaby.

Edith and her father went on talking together for a long time, in low tones, out of unconscious respect to the majestic silence of the night. She asked him a thousand things about the past, of all kinds and sorts, questions which she had prepared before seeing him, and which now came out altogether, anyhow. She asked him whether he had been homesick, and whether he remembered the paper in her bedroom.

Poor Steinegge began to feel a warm glow of love and pride. One by one he told all his troubles to the weeping girl, and his past sufferings seemed as nothing in the light of her consoling sympathy.

A peal of bells rang out, echoed through the valley, and was lost in the wooded depths of the mountains. The next day there was to be a consecration at ——.

'Why do they ring, father?'

'I don't know, darling,' replied Steinegge. '*Die Pfaffen wissen es*, the priests know.'

He had hardly uttered the words when he felt he had done ill, and he said no more. Edith, too, said nothing.

The silence lasted for some minutes.

Finally Steinegge remarked, 'You are tired, Edith, are you not?'

'A little, father.'

The silvery voice was soft and gentle, as always. Steinegge felt happier.

Her voice was always soft and gentle, but a delicate, hardly distinguishable tone of sadness ran through it now. When Steinegge had taken farewell of her with a kiss, Edith returned to the window and seemed to engage in a lengthy colloquy with some being beyond the clouds.

Meanwhile, her father was unable to find repose. Five or six times did he return to knock at her door, to inquire whether she had water, whether she had matches, at what hour she desired to be called, whether they were to bring her coffee, if she wished for this, if she wished for that; he felt inclined to lie down there outside her door like a faithful watch-dog; at length, as the dawn was about to break, he went away and threw himself down fully dressed upon his bed.

CHAPTER II

STEINEGGE

A FEW hours later the bells of R—— were pealing out far and wide, the glad sound ringing through the cottages of the hamlet, spreading out across the meadows and along the hills and up the mountain-sides, till it reached the poorest and most distant hut. Up the winding road which led to the church, one observed a line of dark head-dresses slowly approaching, then disappearing in the large, black doorway, like ants into an ant heap. These were followed by crowds of people in quick succession, all wearing gay head-dresses of red and yellow; a pretentious-looking parasol here and there lagging behind the rest, then a number of black shovel hats which collected about the porch.

Steinegge and Edith were among those who passed in and out through the groups of people; he accompanied her as far as the church, and went out again the next moment. He followed the path which winds up the mountain behind the church, until he reached some rocks surrounded by laurel bushes; there he left the path and sat down.

At this moment Countess Fosca arrives at the church door quite out of breath, although she has come to R—— by boat, while behind her walk Giovanna and

Catte and, at a respectful distance, Momolo, who looks dazed, as though he has been wool-gathering. Her Excellency is scandalised at the conduct of her cousin, the Count, who has stayed away from Mass, and of Marina, who has selected this particular moment to take Nepo for a walk.

Her Excellency purposes to offer up fervent prayers for herself and for her son, who is not to blame for missing Mass, having regard to certain circumstances which the Almighty will take into consideration. Catching sight of Edith, the Countess proceeds to a place beside her, scattering the peasant women right and left, as they make room for the stout old lady and go and kneel down on the hard floor outside the pew. The bell rings, the ecclesiastics enter in their white robes, the priest half lost in his long cassock; the organist places his hands on the key-board and his feet on the pedals; the men then file into church. Five minutes later Marina enters by a side door, followed by Nepo. Passing along the files of men, she makes a sign to her cavalier to find a place among them, and passes on into one of the chapels. Nepo, dressed in the height of the fashion, chances on a place between two malodorous peasants; he makes himself as small as possible, and turns his milksop face in the direction of the aisle, looking all down the church in the attempt to find Marina. He catches sight of Catte kneeling down beside Giovanna, and of Momolo standing upright near the doorway; catches a glimpse of blue sky and of green leaves waving in the wind, as though laughing at him, and then his eyes meet his mother's, but he fails to catch sight of the cruel fair-one who has taken the freak of making him agree to stay away from Mass, only to bring him there after all, and plant him down in the midst of these musty-smelling plebeians.

She was not giving him a thought. The priest had intoned *Credo in unum Deum*, and the people, with the organ accompaniment, responded, *Patrem Omnipotentem.* In the mind of Marina a bright light was flashing over the events of the past month; the discovery of the manuscript, the mysterious promises to Cecilia; the look of love in the eyes of Silla; the close embrace of his strong arms; the probability that he was her unknown correspondent, brought by fate into her presence, and the passion, yes, the dull, silent, slow, overmastering passion which, after so much longing, after so many vanishing dreams, after so much weariness of empty-headed flatterers had come to her at last. She felt a sudden burst of faith and gratitude towards an unknown god, one certainly unlike him whom the worshippers near her were adoring; not so cold a God, not so far away; one beneficent and terrible like the sun, the source of all the warmth and splendour of life.

It was as though God had taken her by the hand and was bearing her up with his Almighty love. She hid her face in her hands, and listened to the loud beating of her heart, while a keen, almost painful sensation traversed her frame as she thought of the unfailing fulfilment of Divine promises, of the predestined passion which would exalt her body and soul above the turbid stream of our dull nature.

On this point she entertained no doubt at all. She reviewed all the difficulties to be surmounted in order to reach the goal; Silla's disappearance without leaving a clue to his whereabouts, his contempt for her, perhaps his forgetfulness of her; the solitude of her life at the castle, where chance could not come to her assistance; the enmity of her uncle; and this absurd Nepo. She took a keen pleasure in conjuring up all the obstacles;

all of them of no avail as against God. *Patrem Omnipotentem.*

To Him, to Him she abandoned herself. With her lithe figure bending over the bench before her, she looked like a *Tentation pénitente.* Countess Fosca glanced at her out of the corners of her eyes, the while she fanned herself vigorously and her lips moved quickly in a silent series of interminable prayers. She was pleased to observe this devotional attitude of Marina's, and pictured to herself the humble obeisance with which the old clerk of Santa Maria Formosa would greet her daughter-in-law. Nepo, in the meantime, was enduring agonies; he repeatedly buried his nose in his perfumed handkerchief, casting stealthy glances at his two big neighbours, and when the latter threw themselves on their knees in company with the other worshippers, he dared not remain standing, but slipped very, very gradually into a kneeling posture, in an agony of anxiety for his dove-coloured trousers. What a difference between this scene and that last Mass at San Filippo, that fair circle of beautiful maidens and fashionable dames; that atmosphere of purified Christianity. He sought consolation in thinking about his cousin. 'An aristocrat by nature,' he remarked to himself. 'I must be her ideal, her Messiah. She does not wish to show it too clearly, that is only natural.'

The bell sounded for the elevation of the Host. Nepo, kneeling, with his head devoutly bent downwards, was thinking: 'Twelve hundred acres in Lomelina, eight hundred in the Novarese, a place at Turin, a palace at Florence.'

Edith, for her part, did not bend her head. She was very pale, and she looked straight before her with a steady and tranquil gaze. Only the trembling of her

hands betrayed the fervour of the heart-felt prayer which, passing above all those bent heads, was winging its way direct to God himself: 'O God, O God, Thou Who knowest how grievously they treated him, wilt Thou not be merciful towards him?' Her face did not wear an expression of ascetic resignation, but of a firm, intelligent will under the chastening influence of sorrow.

Meanwhile, our honest friend Steinegge was hearing Mass *in excelsis*, seated among the laurel bushes, his hands clasped across his knees. He had gone out of church because the marble floor seemed to burn his feet. It was many a long year since he had placed foot inside one of God's prison houses, as he called them. He did not like to leave his daughter outside the church door, but he barely crossed the threshold, and as soon as he saw Edith making her way to the women's side, he began to feel that he had over-estimated his strength. It was not so much his old fierce hatred, as an honourable scruple, which led him to beat a retreat. The good old wolf went outside the fold.

Crouching up there like a wolf in the blues, he paid no heed to the delicious panorama of mountain, stream and meadow which lay stretched out before him; nor did he hear the soft whispering of the leaves close by. He kept looking down at the roof of the church and listening to the confused melody of voice and organ which from time to time issued thence. One thought was in his mind, and he kept repeating it throughout the whole service.

'In her eyes I am a reprobate.'

The thought was bitter enough. He had had so much to fight against, had endured so much suffering, had guarded his honour under the fierce onslaught of hunger, against all the violent desires of a famine-stricken

frame, against all the laches of weakness; and to have preserved it thus, almost more for her sake than for himself; to love her as he loved her; and for her to think of him as a reprobate. Must he then humiliate himself before these priests who had caused him to be a reproach to his parents and to his wife, and were thus responsible for her privations and her death? 'That will be the end of it. I shall humiliate myself in order that Edith may think well of me.' Then he had an idea.

'Suppose I were to address a word to this God of theirs, assuming that there is one.'

He rose to his feet and began to speak in German raising his voice. 'O God, hearken to me for a little while. We are not friends? Granted. I have spoken much ill of the priests, to You or of You I have never spoken a word. If, nevertheless, You desire to treat me as an enemy, I pray You to settle the account. They say that You are a just God, and I, O God, believe this. Look in Your book at the record of Andreas Steinegge, formerly Frederick Von Nassau, and see whether I have not paid enough already. You are very great; I am very small; You are ever young; I am old and weary. What do You still desire to take from me? My daughter Edith's love? It is all that I possess, O God. See whether You cannot leave me it. If You cannot do so, make away with me and end me.'

At the sound of his own voice, Steinegge became more and more moved. He knelt down on one knee.

'I have but little knowledge of You, O God, but my Edith loves You, and I am able to worship You, if You so will. You see that I am kneeling; but let us understand one another, and let us leave the priests on one side. Perhaps I can present some other offering to You. I have my health and my iron constitution. Take these. Let me pine away and die, but come not between

my daughter and me. I cannot kneel down before the priests and tell lies. I am an honest man and a soldier. 'O God,' and here Steinegge knelt with both knees on the ground and lowered his voice, 'I fear that I was a great sinner in my youth. I loved cards and women. Of the twelve duels which I have fought, in three I was in the wrong; I gave the provocation and my adversary was wounded. I regard these as three sins; they have always filled me with remorse. O God of my daughter Edith, I ask Your forgiveness.'

He said no more, and returned to his seat agitated but contented. He felt as though he had made a great step forwards. In his communing with God his scanty faith had so greatly increased that he now awaited some reply from Him. At least he experienced the satisfaction of the poor man who is under the necessity of speaking to a powerful one, by whom he fears to be treated with scorn, and whom, to avoid being repulsed by his servants, he confronts on the highway, addresses with the brevity which the situation demands, is listened to in silence, and believes that this silence covers a growing consideration for him. He lighted a cigar to correct the choking sensation in his throat. Captain Steinegge must not break down. He smoked wildly, furiously. When he felt a little calmer, and as he was looking down with his cigar between the first and second fingers of his right hand, it seemed to him as though the blades of grass peeped out between the stones to utter something at once solemn and incomprehensible, and that the whispering of the trees hard by replied to them. Although a German, he had never understood Nature's language, he had never been sentimental! His cigar went out. What did all this mean? He shook himself together, got up, and went down the hill towards the church.

CHAPTER III

THE RED-AND-BLACK FAN

ONE morning Countess Fosca and Count Cæsar found themselves *tête-à-tête* at breakfast. All the rest of the party had gone to inspect the site of the new paper mill, accompanied by Ferrieri the engineer, Finotti and Vezza, Ferrieri having returned on business, and the other two in order to explore a great cave near the castle, little known to the public, to which they had arranged to go on the following day.

Countess Fosca seemed more lively than ever. Her wig was awry, and the glances which she cast at the Count were more serious than accorded with her facetious prattle. She talked on a hundred different subjects, jumping from one thing to another. The Count replied in monosyllables, in brief remarks thrown out as if to ward off the stream of talk from him. At each of these retorts the Countess changed the subject, but without better success. However, she displayed no irritation. Quite the contrary; she seemed more amiable than ever, while the Count—between his 'just so,' 'certainly,' 'of course'—cast two sharp glances at her, of which the first meant, 'What on earth is in the wind?' and the second and quicker one signified, 'I understand.' After that he did not look at her again.

The Countess relapsed momentarily into silence, leaned back in her chair, and took to fanning herself feverishly with a green fan, making the ribbons of her cap flutter about her rubicund face.

'What a pity it is, Cæsar,' said she.

'Eh?'

'What a pity that we are no longer young.'

'Of course.'

'We should have gone to enjoy ourselves with the others, instead of which we have to stay at home and look at one another, like two luggers rotting in a dock.'

The Count was unable to repress a spasmodic movement of his wrinkled face.

'Eh!' cried the Countess, 'do you think that if I have fallen off somewhat in looks, that you are such a good-looking man? What an idea!'

And here the Countess, talking at the top of her voice, filled her glass.

'Eh! why do you make such eyes at me? Do you think they go through me? I'm not afraid, you must know. Is this the table-cloth of Santa Costanza? I should say that you belonged to that age. Well, what was I saying? You make me lose my head with your grimaces. Goodness gracious, how hot it is! And for me to be sitting here with you! I should have done far better to have gone to see that stupid paper mill. They are enjoying themselves at anyrate. Come, be good, give me a peach. Aren't they just enjoying themselves! Thanks, dear boy. Tell me, yes or no, whether they are enjoying themselves.'

'I do not know.'

'I do not know? But I do. Pretty, that, *I do not know!*'

'Do you like that peach?'

'No, it is good for nothing. And what has the peach to do with it? Let us leave peaches on one side, my dear cousin. What a man, to wander away after the peaches! What were we saying?'

'I? Nothing.'

'Nothing is good for the eyes, and bad for the mouth. Speak up; I have been talking for the past hour. I feel sorry for you. At this rate you will burst presently. Tell us all about it. Why don't you want those young people to amuse themselves?'

'Listen,' said the Count, smiling. 'For my part, I have been greatly amused during the last hour, and it is I who feel sorry for you. You wish to pass very slowly through a broad, deep river, and you go up and down the bank seeking for a bridge which does not exist. Your only way is to jump, my dear cousin. Jump, then, you will come to no harm.'

The Countess became scarlet, and hastily pushed away her plate, on which stood a glass full of Barolo. The wine was spilt over the tablecloth; the Count started and glanced angrily across the table, and her Excellency exclaimed,—

'It is nothing, dear cousin; a mere bagatelle!'

The Count began to fume. It required all the courtly traditions of his house to restrain him from an outburst against his giddy-headed cousin. The stains irritated him as though his family motto had been 'purity.' He rang the bell furiously, and cried to the servant, 'Clear away all those things at once.'

It was like a canon shot, which, with smoke and noise, carried away that choking sensation of wrath, and left him free and at peace.

'Do you feel better, dear Cæsar?' inquired the Countess, after the table had been cleared.

The Count made no reply.

'I feel better, too,' added her Excellency, hastily. 'Let us then talk this matter over. Listen, Cæsar. You, with your great insight into character, understand me thoroughly. I am a poor, ignorant, foolish creature, but good-hearted. I am all heart. When an affair concerns my own flesh and blood, my own boy, I get quite confused; the few ideas I have run together in a heap—I see nothing more, know nothing. I am only a poor woman, and that is how things go with me. Help me, Cæsar, advise me. I want you to look into things, to speak, to do everything. You are of the same blood as my poor Alvise. It is Alvise who tells me to place myself in your hands on behalf of our son, on behalf of my Nepo.'

As she uttered the name, the Countess was moved to tears, and dried her eyes with an immense pocket-handkerchief.

'Pardon me, Cæsar,' she said. 'I am a mother, I am old, I am foolish.'

The tearful voice of his cousin was not melodious, and did not arouse the interest of the Count, who had drawn back his chair at an angle to the table, and, throwing one leg over the other, swung it backwards and forwards, looking all the time at the Venetian lady by Palma.

The lachrymose mood of his cousin's was a new one, and pleased him even less than the others. After a few minutes' silence, during which the Countess held her handkerchief over her nose and her left eye, the Count turned his head towards her, and continuing to swing his leg, while with the middle finger of his right hand he thrummed I know not what note on the table, he remarked,—

'Well?'

'Well, great heavens! I see here certain things which alarm me, if you understand. Even in all delicacy, I cannot refrain from speaking. Young people are young people, one knows, but we older folks ought to supply the judgment in which they are lacking.'

'You say you are alarmed; but, just tell me, was not all this what you yourself intended?'

'What I intended, indeed? Of course, it was not what I intended. My intention was to let you know my son, to lead you to take a liking to him, and to give him sound advice on this very question of his marriage. He has refused two or three matches which I had in view for him, most eligible girls, too, and I don't know the reason. I have endeavoured to find out; I have made inquiries as to whether there was any intrigue, any foolish entanglement. There is nothing of the kind. He is not an anchorite, I am thankful to say, and has, I do not doubt, led, well, a young man's life, but he is prudent, he is cautious. There is no shadow of an entanglement. Well! The matter causes me sleepless nights. I cannot broach the subject. He believes that all one is looking for is money. Great heavens! I am a mother, and I have to think of everything. All that he thinks of is the heart, the wit, the talent, the beauty, the playing, the singing and many other things, light as air, and of no account compared with what is in my mind. Excellent things in themselves, but they don't suffice. I thought that, perhaps for the present, he was opposed to the idea of marriage. It was not so; I learnt for certain what his views were, though still in the air, so to speak. Then I came here, in order, I repeat, that you might give him sage counsel. Marina? That is where I was wrong. It never occurred to me that he would fall in love with Marina. Listen, Cæsar, I am outspoken. Let us speak

frankly, although she be your niece. The girl has changed greatly of late. Nepo and I knew her at Milan. With all her wealth, with all her grandeur, my son cared for her not the least. She struck him as a haughty aristocrat. For my son holds your views on the subject of birth—the views that obtain now since Italy became united Italy. My son is not one of those snobs who turn their backs on you if you have not four quarterings. Well, at that time, we did not greatly care for your niece. It never once occurred to me that he would change his tune. There I was wrong, for I must confess to you that she is a darling, a *bonbon;* and then her misfortunes! I forgot about her misfortunes; I forgot what a heart my son has. Nepo takes after his mother there. A large heart, dear cousin, is a dead weight which drags one down. Whoever has a large heart—'

'Well, well?' interrupted the Count, who felt that it was about time to close the argument.

'Well, am I not right to say all this to you, his uncle, his second father. I have told you what confidence I place in you, and now I don't know whether the affair ought to be allowed to proceed. I see one side of the picture, I see the other; I see this, I see that; I like it, and I don't like it. Oh, heavens, it is a heart-rending dilemma!'

The Countess once more raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Just then a door opened, and Catte appeared, bringing her Excellency's snuff-box. The Countess turned upon her in a rage, and cried out in a strident voice,—

'Take care! How many times have I told you not to come bothering when people are talking!'

Catte laid down the snuff-box on a chair, and retired in haste.

The Count was lost in admiration at the versatile emotions of his cousin, who, gently bending her head, again carried her handkerchief to her eyes.

'And now,' he resumed, 'may I say one word?'

'Oh, good gracious, am I not waiting for it like the manna from heaven!'

'All the things you have noticed have passed me unobserved; perhaps I am blind. But let that be as it may, it is not necessary for two people to lose their sleep, their appetite and their heads, in order to be able to live fairly well together. Still, I confess that I do not myself see clearly in this affair.'

The dull, tearful eyes of the Countess suddenly brightened. She laid the handkerchief on her knees.

'Nor do I see,' continued the Count, 'what kind of happiness can result from the union of your son and my niece.'

'Well!' exclaimed her Excellency, in dismay.

'My niece has plenty of intelligence, and as curious a head as the Almighty and the Evil One can put together, when they both work in competition.'

'But what nonsense, Cæsar!'

'Not at all. Don't you know that the trade mark of both is stamped on every object in the world? That being so, my niece ought to have as husband a man of steel, strong and brilliant. Your son is certainly not a man of steel. Oh, I don't despise him on that account. The men of steel are not found by the dozen. In my opinion, your son, who, by the way, does not hold my views on the subject of birth, would not be a suitable husband for Marina.'

Countess Fosca, who was now untying her cap, shaking her head, and breathing hard, replied,—

'What is all this? What have you been talking about?

Oh! what things to say! It makes me hot to listen to you. I did not follow the whole of your argument; but if it was hostile to my son, as it appeared to me to be, I have the honour to inform you, with all respect to your abilities, that you know nothing at all about it. Go to Venice and inquire about my son, and see what you will hear. Not that he is made of steel; gold is what he is. You may be of steel, and of pewter too. You bring out remarks which fairly make me lose my head. Of steel? Did ever one hear such things? Steel is what they make pens of, my dear.'

Here the Countess made a brief pause, accompanied by grand sweeps of her fan.

'What stuff!' she continued. 'You know nothing about it. Oh! you know nothing about it, my dear cousin. And that poor, dear girl, Marina, even her you don't understand, Mr Bear. Oh, no, it won't do.'

Here followed four sweeps of the fan. Meanwhile, the Count was looking at her with an amazed expression, too marked to be altogether genuine.

'But, in that case,' he said, 'it is true that I don't understand. If you have these ideas, why, in heaven's name, are you afraid of your son paying court to my niece?'

'Listen to me, Cæsar. I may have all the faults and failings in the world, but I am sincere. Will you take it in ill part if I speak frankly? Another thing is, that if my son gets to know that I have broached certain subjects to you, there is no more quiet or peace of mind for me, I can assure you, Cæsar. Do you wish me to go on? The words seem to stick in my throat, and I have difficulty in getting them out. It is a great humiliation for me; the whole thing is contrary to my nature, but facts are facts and duty is duty.'

The Countess laid down her fan on the table, replaced her handkerchief in her pocket, re-tied the strings of her cap, and finally recommenced, in slow, solemn tones,—

'This is how things stand. The Salvador family of to-day is not the Salvador family of years ago; would that it were! Poor Alvise was very unfortunate in his affairs, and then came 1848, and you know what happened then. It is not for me to say so; but if it hadn't been for my property, the house of Salvador would have made shipwreck. When Alvise married me, my estate was worth so and so. Would that he were alive now! May his soul rest in peace. We should be ruined by this time, but we should be happy all the same. Of the anxieties, the fatigues, the privations that have fallen to my lot, dear cousin, I will not speak. In my house, the most penurious economy. My estates were in the hands of thieves—my steward at their head. "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." With two thousand two hundred acres in Polesine, I was obliged to buy rice for my household! I need say no more. Oh, heavens, what a life it was! Well, by dint of toil and sacrifice we steered the ship to harbour; but, at the present moment, it depends on Nepo whether she remains there. All hangs on Nepo's marriage! And now, tell me, Cæsar; if, in the kindness and generosity of your heart, you had not taken pity on poor Marina, how would she live? Tell me, my dear friend, what would she live on?'

'Her own property—that is what she would live on.'

'Her own property?'

Countess Fosca opened her eyes wide.

'Certainly. The winding up of my brother-in-law's estate realised eighty thousand francs.'

'Well, bread and water, to be frank.'

'I am not such a *grand seigneur* as to be able to say

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that. I value eighty thousand francs. For me it would be enough.'

'Well, we will say bread and water and fruit. And still you would have to see whether it would be enough. Just take to yourself a wife—young, beautiful, full of life and energy—and settle down at Milan or at Turin among a string of fast characters as long as from here to Mestre, with duels and intrigues without end, for you have to have those too; dress her, undress her, amuse her, provide her with carriages, and also — I was going to say —in short, you venture on a family, and then I shall like to hear how far you find your eighty thousand carry you. I am speaking to you from the bottom of my heart, Cæsar, because I regard you as my near relative. My first impulse was to take Nepo right away at once; but what would you have said of me? I decided to speak to you as I would to a brother; and I have done so.'

'I thank you heartily for the honour,' replied the Count. 'You honour me even more than you think. The advice that I would give you is to depart at once.'

The Countess remained silent, stricken to the heart.

During that deathlike silence one could hear two flies fighting inside a sugar-basin.

'By all means,' said she. It seemed as though her Excellency, after so much chattering, suddenly found herself short of breath.

'Of course,' added the Count, 'it is quite possible that you will not have to go. It will depend on my niece.'

'How do you mean, on your niece?'

'It is pretty clear. As an honourable man, I had to give you the advice I have given, because I don't think that my niece and your son are suited to one another. You do not share this opinion, neither, apparently, does

your son, and it may happen that my niece, who is perfectly qualified and has the right to form her own opinion, does not share it either. In that case, you will understand that I neither could nor would make my views prevail.'

'You go on as before, Cæsar; after all I have said to you.'

The Count got up and interrupted her. 'Will you kindly favour me in my library. It is a weakness of mine to transact all business there.'

The Countess wished to make some reply, but her cousin, standing with the door open, signed to her to pass on. He put in his pocket the snuff-box brought in by Catte, and followed the Countess to the library. When her Excellency had made herself comfortable in an arm-chair, the Count began walking up and down the room in silence, his head bent forward and his hands in his pockets, according to his custom. Having made five or six turns, the Count stood still in front of her, looked at her for a moment, and said,—

'What do you think of three hundred and twenty thousand francs?'

Her Excellency's face became purple. She muttered something unintelligible.

'Three hundred and twenty thousand francs and her eighty thousand make four hundred thousand. What do you think of four hundred thousand francs?'

'In heaven's name, Cæsar, what do you mean? I don't understand.'

'Oh, you understand perfectly well,' said the Count, with curious emphasis. 'It is a mystery in regard to which you were lacking neither in faith nor in hope before you spoke to me. I return you my best thanks. You have done me the honour of believing that I should

provide with sufficient liberality for my niece's settlement in life, although I am under no obligation to do so, and although she does not bear my name. Is that not so?'

Her Excellency again untied her cap and burst forth—

'Allow me, sir, to tell you what I think of you—that your mode of speech is one for railway porters and not for ladies. I am astonished that, at your juvenile age, you have not yet mastered the usages of society. And I am astonished that, with your uncouth ways, your fitting clothes and unkempt hair, you imagine you can say and do anything that occurs to you. You may be a nobleman, my dear sir, but you are not a gentleman. Do you imagine that if I were the only person concerned that I should not say to you Keep your money for yourself? Do you think I would remain another hour in a house where I am not treated with ordinary politeness? Thank your stars that I am not the person concerned, for I am independent of my son and of everybody else, and my own money is more than enough for me. And I should not know what to do with your three hundred thousand. Bah! Nor with your four hundred thousand. Bah! And I, poor foolish woman, who have confided in you as though you were my brother. Thank heaven! I repeat, that I am old and prudent, for if my son knew that self-seeking motives were attributed to him, he would be capable of sacrificing his love, his happiness and everything else.'

The warmth of this harangue was perfectly genuine. Countess Fosca, after bringing her cousin to the point she had been leading up to, now felt offended at his speaking plainly on the subject. A trifling disillusion may also have contributed to make her feel herself

affronted. The Count had not said in so many words, as she had hoped, '*Marina is my heir.*'

The Count listened sweetly to the furious onslaught of his cousin, as though it were no affair of his, and contented himself with replying,—

'The wine that you spill leaves a stain; the words, no.'

The Countess appeared not to hear him. She had already risen and was moving, muttering to herself, towards the door. Her cousin, standing upright, his rugged face bent downwards, was watching her, smiling; perhaps because her Excellency reminded him of a young goose which has been disturbed by some villager whilst feeding, or while peacefully conversing with her neighbours, or while engaged in solitary reflections, and who, after cackling loudly and beating a hasty retreat, departs with much dignity, though still greatly agitated, expressing at short intervals with low strident cries her anger and disdain. When the Countess was near the door the Count moved a step forwards.

'Wait,' said he.

Her Excellency stopped, and turned her head a little to the left.

The Count came up behind her, holding out an object, which he held in his left hand and tapped with the right.

Her Excellency turned her head round a little more and glanced out of the corners of her eyes at the Count's hands, then she turned right round.

The Count was offering her an open snuff-box.

Her Excellency hesitated a moment, made a grimace, and said brusquely,—

'Is it Valgadena?'

The Count, by way of reply, merely tapped the snuff-box with two fingers.

The Countess stretched forth a thumb and forefinger,

rubbing their tips together with sensuous anticipation; then she plunged them into the soft, aromatic mixture, and remarked, with a more reconciled air,—

'That was a great indignity, you know, Cæsar.'

She carried the snuff to her nostrils. 'A horrible insult!' she added.

She smelt the snuff. She smelt it once, twice, thrice, bent down over the snuff-box, knit her eyebrows and seized hold of the Count's left hand.

'Oh,' she cried, 'so you are a thief as well?'

The Count laughed and handed her the snuff-box, saying,—

'We understand each other. All that is required is Marina's consent.'

Her Excellency left the room, shutting the door unceremoniously in his face. Passing through the loggia, she noticed the two boats on their way back to the castle. Her Excellency hurried upstairs to her bedroom, leaving her green fan there, and taking instead a black one with red flowers, with which she returned to the loggia, fanning herself and leaning over the balustrade.

The two boats sparkled in the sun on the green waters of the lake a few hundred yards away. The oars were flashing as they struck and rose out of the water. A gay medley of voices and laughter was wafted to her Excellency's ears, now more, now less clearly, according to the breeze. The boats looked like two bright butterflies which had fallen into the water and were struggling there, laboriously working their wings, and leaving behind them two long, fine, converging lines. The *Dart* came first, flying the Admiral's flag, and a little to the left could be seen the white hull of the jolly-boat. Marina, Nepo, Finotti and Vezza were in the *Dart;* the jolly-boat carried Steinegge, Ferrieri and Don Inno-

say farewell to life. For his part, he preferred a young vintage full of light and fire, which passes like lightning to the head, the heart, the conscience, for only such wine knows where the conscience lives; wine that has within it all the heat of the sun and all the passions of the earth, full of colour, sparkling with effervescence which makes both the bottles and the scruples fly.

'Tell me, Signor Vezza,' said Marina, quite suddenly, 'did you reply to those letters?'

Signor Vezza, who took his soft 'commendatore' with his morning coffee from the servant, and with his evening coffee from the ladies, and always with a keen relish, felt acutely the privation inflicted on him by Marina, but was obliged to resign himself to it, for Marina recognised no titles except those of noble birth.

'I replied to the ladies who were beautiful,' he said.

'Let us understand this marvel of subtlety,' rejoined Marina, as she carelessly watched Rico's oar rise and fall.

'There is no subtlety, Marchesina. One might say that in the anonymous letters of beautiful women there is always a shade of reserve, and in those of the plain ones always a shade of abandon; but this would be a vulgar way of putting it. It is the instinct that is necessary; the instinctive sense of beauty. When you, Marchesina, enter at the first floor a thrill ought to pass through the student on the fourth floor who is buried in the *Constitutional Law* of our friend Finotti. What do you say, Count?'

But Nepo paid no heed to the conversation. Nepo was looking with great interest at the castle. He was wondering whether his mother was in the loggia, and whether she had in her hand the green fan, or the black-and-red one, or the white handkerchief. If the Countess

was not there at all it would mean that she had not been able to have the important conversation with the Count. If she was there the green fan signified 'no luck'; the red-and-black one 'good luck'; the white handkerchief would mean '*Marina will have everything.*'

He started at Vezza's question and stared at him.

He had not understood the remark. Marina slightly shrugged her shoulders and spoke to Finotti.

Rico, who was always being worried and teased by his Excellency, turned round and looked slyly at him with eyes glittering with malice.

'Look where you are rowing to, idiot,' said his Excellency, in a low tone.

Rico laughed to himself and bit his lip as he plunged the dripping oars into the water and rested on them, while he waited for the jolly-boat, which now and then lagged behind. They could hear Ferrieri talking in a loud voice. Vezza called to him, and receiving no reply, made some remark about him and Miss Steinegge. Marina pursed up her lips, as though to say, 'bad taste,' and Vezza whispered, smiling,—

'A calculating match.'

'Go on!' said Marina to Rico.

The long sharp keel glided on through the motionless green water. A few leaves slumbering on that glassy surface came opposite the boat, quickly passed by, and disappeared. The castle began to grow more distinct, spread out, rose before them, threw open doors and windows; the cypresses in the background began to stand out from the mountain and come towards the boat; the mountain itself began to move behind them. The black spot in the third arch of the loggia became a lady, a matron, the Countess Fosca with a big red-and-black butterfly on her breast. One could hear the

fountain in the courtyard, one could hear the Countess's voice,—

'Are you there, my children?'

'Yes, here we are. Such a lovely picnic, mamma; enjoyed ourselves so much; saw all sorts of things; no accident. Or, rather to be correct, there was one accident; my cousin has been very amusing, and I have been very dull.'

Shouting out the above, Nepo solemnly adjusted his *pince-nez* and looked at Marina. He seemed a different man. He had shaken his arms till the small white cuffs fell down over his knuckles, and he looked at his cousin with a foolish air of triumph. Marina pretended not to have heard his impertinent remark, and turned round to look for the jolly-boat. Meanwhile, the *Dart*, with Nepo, Rico, the commendatori, the lady and the flag, disappeared into the cool shade of the boat-house, where Nepo's voice was already resounding between the large damp vaulted roof and the green water clear as a mirror of emerald. He shook his head to make his *pince-nez* drop, and leapt delicately ashore with his arms spread out and his knees bent, and then held out his hands to the others, very nearly succeeding in getting them thrown into the water by the *Dart*, which Vezza, in his cold way, called 'a pair of scales,' from its sensitiveness to any disturbance of weight. When Marina's turn came he held out both hands to her and pressed hers warmly; she frowned slightly, leapt ashore and released her hands. On the steps they came across Fanny in a corner of the wall, her eyes downcast. She raised them with a faint smile to Nepo, who came last. There seemed to be something in the wind; but Nepo, who, during the first few days had ventured now on a word or two, now on a silent caress, passed her by without

even looking at her. Her face clouded over, and she went slowly down the steps.

Count Cæsar greeted his guests gaily at the head of the steps, and was especially courteous to Don Innocenzo. Countess Fosca embraced Marina as though they had not met for ten years, and only noticed Steinegge after his fourth obeisance. Marina left the room and the assembled company, and so did Edith.

Meanwhile, the Count, Ferrieri and Don Innocenzo were discussing, in a corner, the new paper mill in connection with the health and morality of the district, which the Count thought would not be improved. Don Innocenzo, in his innocent enthusiasm for all kinds of progress, and dazzled by the description of the building and of the powerful engines ordered from Belgium, took a more rosy view of things and would not see the dark side. The others stood talking politics near a window. The Countess asked Finotti how long the Austrians would continue to hold Venice. Finotti, who had sat in the left centre, and was in favour at Court and hated the ministry of the day, assumed an air of mystery, and said that they would be able to go to Venice, but with other men in power. The Countess did not understand how Italian diplomacy had received such a check, and begged Finotti to put the King on the right path, and his ministers too. If they couldn't learn they must be changed and thrown into the sea. If Venice only knew what went on! At Milan she had seen a portrait of the Prime Minister. What good could a man with a nose like that be?

Nepo intervened, very red in the face, saying that she did not understand politics, and would only make herself ridiculous. This acted like a douche of icy water. Steinegge knitted his brows. The others held their

tongues. The Countess, accustomed to such filial compliments, observed quietly that women often have more political sagacity than men.

'Always,' said Vezza; 'and the cabinet at Turin is worth nothing in comparison with yours, Countess.'

Finotti and Steinegge also plied her with compliments. Nepo felt embarrassed. He adjusted his *pince-nez*, and fanning himself with his handkerchief, went out into the loggia. As he entered, Marina came in from the other side.

Noticing Nepo, she seemed to hesitate for a moment, walked slowly up to the balcony which overlooked the lake, standing in the shadow of a pillar, and then turned round to look at her cousin.

Nepo could not retreat. He would have wished to speak to his mother, and find out precisely all about the interview with Count Cæsar before taking a step forward; but since he knew that, on the whole, things had gone well, how could he withdraw before the silent invitation of Marina's eyes, which plainly said: 'Come, we are alone.'

In spite of his conceit he felt embarrassed. Hitherto he had only tried his hand with dressmakers, milliners and servant girls; with the ladies he drew the line at platonic friendship. His heart gave him no inspiration, and his mind but little.

He walked up towards Marina, and leaning over the balcony beside her, shook off his *pince-nez*.

'Dear cousin,' said he.

The *pince-nez*, falling on the marble, was smashed to pieces.

Nepo removed the fragments from the cord, and, letting them fall on the rock below, remarked with a sigh,—

'It was by Fries.'

Having pronounced this concise funeral oration, he resumed,—

'Dear cousin—'

Behind him came a discordant medley of voices. Countess Fosca's, the Count's and the others.

'Dear cousin,' replied Marina, looking beyond the little bay out on to the open lake where the first breath of the southern breeze was scarring with leaden lines the reflections of the white clouds and blue sky. There was silence for a moment. In the other room the hubbub of discordant voices continued.

'What delightful days I have passed with you, dear cousin!'

'Really?'

'Why—why should it not always be so?'

He had struck the note at last, and continued in an emphatic tone, as though he were repeating the peroration to a speech in parliament.

'Why should not these delightful days be the prelude to a life of bliss to which everything invites us —our family traditions, our birth, our education, our inclination?'

Marina bit her lip.

'Yes,' resumed Nepo, warming at the sound of his own voice, and with difficulty repressing an oratorical gesture. 'Yes, for even I, who have moved in the best society of Venice and Turin, and have made warm friendships with many beautiful and charming ladies, from the first moment that I set eyes on you, have felt for you an irresistible sympathy—'

'Thanks,' murmured Marina.

'One of those sympathies which rapidly become a passion in the case of a young man like myself, sus-

ceptible to beauty, to wit, with a keen feeling for the most exquisite and delicate refinements. For you, my cousin, possess all these things; you are a Greek statue brought to life in Italy and educated at Paris, as the English Ambassador remarked to me, with less reason, speaking of Countess C——. You will one day be able to nobly represent my house in the capital, whether at Rome or at Turin; for I shall certainly finish my career with a position at the capital worthy of my name, worthy of Venice. I speak to you, my dear cousin, in language more weighty than passionate, because this is not the commencement of a romance but the continuation of a history.'

Nepo paused for a moment to mentally congratulate himself on this phrase, in which thought and voice led so effectively and so harmoniously to the final word, history.

'It is the history,' he continued, 'of two illustrious families—one the support of the most glorious of Italian Republics—one of the most illustrious monarchy—the one in the extreme east, the other in the extreme west of Italy, who became united by marriage in distant centuries, in times of foreign tyranny and national discord, a prelude, as it were, to the future unity; families which in more recent years, in years disastrous to their two states, have renewed the bond and are now about to reconfirm it amidst the splendid achievements accompanying the new great national compact.'

Nepo was exhausted by the terrible effort of controlling his voice and checking his eloquence. Who can say how far he would have gone with the thousands of phrases that were in his mind if he had not now suddenly pulled himself up short.

'Marina,' said he 'will you become Countess Salvador? I await with full confidence your reply.'

Marina still looked out upon the lake and kept silence. At that moment the voices in the next room subsided; Countess Fosca appeared in the entrance to the loggia. She quickly withdrew again and went into the sitting-room, talking loudly; but the others now burst into the loggia.

'I appeal to you, Marchesina,' cried Finotti, who was followed by Vezza, shrugging his shoulders, smiling, and repeating, 'You are wrong, you are wrong.'

Not till then did Marina start up, as though wishing to change the current of her thoughts, and saying *sotto voce* to Nepo, 'To-morrow,' she left the balcony.

Nepo turned round angrily on the intruders, and behind them saw his mother, who, with a long and melancholy glance, and outstretched arms, inquired,—

'How goes it?'

CHAPTER IV

IN THE CAVERN

THEY had arranged to start for the cavern at ten o'clock next morning. They had to row along the lake to its eastern extremity, and then pass up the valley that waters it with the little mountain torrent which has hollowed out the caves. The whole party went, with the exception of the Count.

Nepo was up in good time, and he went into the garden, where he had sometimes seen Marina take a walk before breakfast. To-day she did not come. Nepo, bereft of his *pince-nez* wandered from one side of the garden to the other, burying his long nose in the shrubs and flowers, sniffing the fresh air, starting at the distant apparition of the gardener in his shirt sleeves. Marina did not put in an appearance at breakfast, not an unusual thing with her.

Fanny appeared and begged Edith, on behalf of her ladyship, to join her in her room. The two reappeared together on the stroke of ten. Marina merely favoured Nepo with a careless 'good morning,' thrown to him in the manner with which one flings away the stump of a cigar. She took Edith's arm in hers and descended to the boat-house, leaving Countess Fosca, Nepo, the three professional men, and Steinegge, to follow. As they entered the boat-house the *Dart*, with Edith, Marina and

Rico left it. There was a chorus of protests. '*Bon voyage*,' replied Marina, 'we are going to lead the way.'

This was said in the softest of voices, with the most gracious of airs. Yet nobody pressed the matter further.

Countess Fosca turned towards Nepo and looked very grave; he affected indifference, and shouted out some compliment to the cruel fugitives. Ferrieri and the two commendatori seemed greatly annoyed.

The two boats steered for the narrow part of the lake, where it makes a bend and curves round a wooded promontory amid willows and banks of reeds. The *Dart* kept well ahead of the jolly-boat in spite of the frequent supplications from those in the latter not to go so fast. The jolly-boat resembled a gouty old gentleman making wild efforts to pursue a young monkey of a nephew who has given him the slip. Marina pretended not to hear those cries, and one glance at her face made Rico comprehend that he was not to stop or even slacken his pace. Very soon all that those in the jolly-boat could see of the *Dart* was a mere white speck, its flag, waving in the distance in the bluish haze of lake and morning mists still clinging to the mountain sides.

Edith was greatly moved. The clear, bright air through which the boat was travelling, the thousands of flashing rays thrown by the sun upon the water ruffled by the morning breeze, the vivid green of the mountains hard by, the warm, confused tints of the plains, no longer recalled Germany to her as the meadows in front of Don Innocenzo's parsonage had done. She could not speak; a sigh escaped her.

'What does it make you feel?' asked Marina, after a long silence.

'I hardly know; a desire to weep,' replied Edith.

'It makes me desire to live, to be happy.'

Edith remained silent; she was surprised at the sudden fire which flashed from the face of Marina, whose breast was heaving tumultuously.

'I have a great respect for you,' added the latter, brusquely.

Edith looked at her in astonishment.

'I know quite well,' the other continued, 'that you dislike me; that makes no difference.'

'I do not dislike you,' replied Edith, in slow, grave tones.

Marina shrugged her shoulders.

'Guide the boat as you can,' she cried out to Rico, letting go the tiller-ropes, and, turning round towards Edith, was about to speak. But Edith anticipated her.

'I know,' she said, 'that you have not been nice to my father, and for that reason I can feel no affection for you. I wish I could say what I want to say in German, because I can't express it well in Italian. However, you will understand what I mean; I do not dislike you.'

'You are going to settle down at Milan?' inquired Marina.

'Yes.'

'I want you to write to me.'

Edith reflected for a moment, and replied,—

'I can't write to you as a friend.'

'You are a very frank young lady, but not more so than myself. I never said I was your friend. I said I had a great respect for you. There is no such thing as friendship between women. I don't ask for sentimental letters, all falsehood and foolishness. What use should I put them to? I want a little information. Friendship has nothing to do with that.'

'Nor respect either.'

'Yes, it has. I don't ask for services from people

whom I don't respect, and I feel sure that you will render me this service, in spite of your resentment. Have you not given me the pleasure of your company this morning alone with me in my boat?'

'What information do you require?'

'You see! I knew you would! I will tell you later on.'

After some time Marina came out with another question.

'Your mother was of noble birth?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! I understand.'

Edith fired up, and her bright eyes flashed.

'I know no person more noble than my father,' she said.

'What do you think of my cousin?' inquired Marina, without paying any heed to this rejoinder, as though it failed to reach her on the lofty heights of her grandeur.

'I do not know him.'

'Have you not seen him, have you not heard him speak?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Go on rowing,' said Marina to Rico, stamping on the bottom of the boat.

Hearing Nepo's name mentioned, he had leant forward with an impulse of curiosity, and his arms hardly moved. He now blushed and laughed, then became serious and gave two vigorous strokes with the oars, which made the water fly up in foam on either side of the boat. When the ladies ceased talking, the boy began repeating to himself the names of villages and mountains. Marina had resumed her steering and took no notice of him; Edith began asking him questions, and then his silvery voice rippled along the bank. From the mountains of

Val —— one could hear from time to time the baying of hounds borne faintly on the breeze. Rico explained to Edith that these were not hounds, but the ghosts of the 'Forest pack.' Whoever saw them died within the week. Edith was pleased at meeting an old German legend, and inquired whether there were roads among the mountains. The lad replied that there were paths, one of them a very good one, by which one could return on foot from the caves to the castle.

The *Dart* was now passing along Val Malombra, and skirting the hilly wooded promontory. The water was here of great depth beneath the jutting rocks. Rico maintained that the lake at this point spread away into fathomless caves through a dark chasm in the rocks called the Well of Acquafonda, and that if you threw stones down it you could hear them splashing into the water below. And he began to explain how those hidden caves could be explored, but Marina lost her patience and bade him hold his tongue.

Soon afterwards the *Dart* passed from sunshine to shade, and was moored against two clumps of grey willows, on the white sand of a little mountain stream which flowed towards the lake, from pool to pool, in silent, winding rivulets. Behind the willows lay cold sombre fields, which, with the stream, disappeared on the left in the bluish mists of the winding valley. High up in the sunshine the mountain range was gleaming; but the black chasm before them seemed like a den of winter itself. As soon as the boat had passed the rocks of the promontory one could hear the Countess call out, 'How cold it is, how horribly chilly,' and there was a confused movement in the boat, as arms were stretched out and slipped into coats and cloaks, while Count Nepo wrapped a white handkerchief round his neck.

Rico was to serve as guide to the cavern, sometimes called the Horror, but before they started Countess Fosca had a question to ask. Her Excellency had imagined that the Horror was the cave in front of them; she was met with a storm of protests, and was astonished at the astonishment of the others; the place struck her as quite ugly enough. And now, what did they expect her, unfortunate woman, to do? To sit there dangling her legs for two or three hours over those hideous rocks? To wait for the others in this ice-house? Nepo began to fume, and reproached her with not having stayed at home. Steinegge protested vigorously, Vezza in a whisper, that they would never leave her ladyship alone. Neither Finotti nor the engineer made any remark. It was finally arranged that her Excellency was to go with Steinegge to an inn, which could be seen shining in the sun, about a mile away, where the high road passes the lake. Rico declared that one could get there by another path after passing through the Horror. As the boat pushed off from the bank, Commendatore Finotti asked Rico a question, and then turned round and shouted out,—

'Courage, Countess! The Horror is not far off!'

'Is that it?' inquired the Countess of the others, pointing towards Finotti.

The party then started up the stream on foot, following Rico, who jumped like a frog from rock to rock. Edith and Marina were next to him, then came Ferrieri, a great walker and mountaineer. Behind him trotted Nepo, bent double, and bursting into perspiration at the hurried passage over the sharp rocks. He pretended to appeal to Marina's consideration for the two commendatori, who laboriously brought up the rear.

'My dear cousin,' replied Marina, coming to a halt

and turning round, 'I beg you to represent my uncle and to act as guide to his three guests.'

Nepo and Ferrieri, taking the hint, slackened their pace, and gloomily turned back to meet the two commendatori, who came along, Finotti puffing and blowing, Vezza sulky and discouraged. When they noticed the ladies parting company with the two other men, all hope of catching them up died away, and they stopped to take breath, grumbling at Marina, and cursing the person who had first started the idea of this horrible forced march. At this point Rico suddenly appeared, having been sent back to them by Marina so that they should not lose their way. Having been told by the boy how to proceed, Marina walked on rapidly without speaking. Edith followed close behind her, silent and nervous also, though from other causes. Within and around her she seemed to hear one word only—'Italy, Italy.' From the moment of her arrival at the castle, whenever she was alone, whenever she ceased for a moment to think of her father and their future, this one thought would flash across her mind—'Italy.' At such times she would stretch out her hand as though in search of some tangible reality, and as she watched the setting sun, or the white winding line of some distant road, she became lost in a mist of vague desire. She now halted frequently, and, as the road rapidly ascended, observed the solemn line of mountains slowly extend before her, their green summits flashing in the sunlight and piercing the blue sky high above, while far away at their feet the dark waters of the lake spread out in a vast sheet towards the west.

'Ah,' said Marina, as they emerged into the sunlight, 'here we are.'

She jumped with joy as she revelled in the light and heat.

Their path now led them between two fields of maize. A cloud of butterflies rose from the white blooms, fluttered over them for a few seconds, and settled down again.

'It is like snow,' said Marina, turning for the first time to Edith.

But Edith had halted some way down the path.

'Are they coming?' cried Marina.

'I hear the voices of your cousin and the boy.'

Marina made a little grimace. 'Come with me,' she said.

A little further on the road led up to a group of stables, at an angle of the mountain, where the path turns towards the cavern. These rough shanties were in the middle of a large heap of stinking mud, in the clear shadow thrown by some lofty walnut trees, whose foliage was flooded in sunshine. Not a sign of any living creature was to be seen; all was silence. An empty basket near the closed doors, a bit of rope tied to the woodwork over the well, the deep dark valley, and the distant murmur of invisible waterfalls deepened the silence of the spot. The path pointed out by Rico led between the stables; Marina followed another narrow pathway, leading up to a little chapel. She motioned to Edith to sit down, and added quietly,—

'Let us wait for them to pass us.'

In the little chapel was a picture of the Saviour, crowned with thorns, a hideous painting, at the foot of which was the inscription:

> 'O passer-by! though I appear a monster,
> I am Jesus Christ, thy Lord and Master.'

The grass around them still glistened with dew, and the breeze, which lightly stirred the leaves of the walnut trees, was cool and fresh.

Edith looked at the picture, the pious offering of simple folk to the King of Suffering, and her heart was filled with a sad and tender pity; a thousand thoughts passed through her mind—the faith of the poor, unskilled artist, of the simple poet, of the rough, peasant women who, on their way to the fields, or when they returned wearied out in the evening, would raise their eyes to this poor daub with deeper veneration than they would have felt in looking at a Virgin by Luino. Edith tried to pursue this line of thought but could not do so; she felt as though a hard, cold chain was wound about her. In a confused way she discerned the disturbing influence of a human spirit close to her and antagonistic to her, stirred by other passions, haughty and reserved. Between her and the sunlight stood the tall form of Marina, tracing characters in the dust with the tip of her umbrella, looking down steadily at the ground, her lips pursed; her dark shadow fell across Edith, and seemed to freeze her blood.

Meanwhile, the voices of the rest of the party came nearer and nearer. A hasty step was heard among the stables, and a minute later the bright face of Rico appeared behind the chapel. Catching sight of the two ladies, he suddenly halted and opened his lips to speak, when a flashing glance from Marina cut him short. He ran quickly up to some mulberry bushes, plucked some of the fruit and ran down the hill. The deep voices of the commendatori could be heard near the stables. Finotti was telling naughty stories with much richness of expression, after the manner of worn-out *roués*, who seek for the energy of youth in licentiousness of language. Ferrieri could be heard remarking with a laugh,—

'Nastiness inspires you.'

Marina, herself indifferent, gave a rapid glance towards

Edith; but the latter, incapable of understanding such allusions, neither moved a muscle nor changed colour. Her companion shrugged her shoulders and waited in silence till the voices died away, then sat down beside her.

'The information I spoke of,' she said, 'touches a person with whom you will become acquainted at Milan.'

Edith looked at her in surprise; Marina made a slight gesture of impatience. Edith then remembered the interrupted conversation on the lake.

'Are you sure,' she replied, 'that I shall know this person?'

'You will have to know him.'

'Have to?'

'Yes, have to. Not to please me, but because it will happen so. You will meet this person at Milan, he being a friend of your father's.'

'His name is Silla.'

Marina's eyes flashed.

'How do you know?' she asked.

'My father has spoken to me about his friend.'

'What did he say?'

Edith did not answer.

'Are you afraid?' said Marina, harshly.

Edith coloured.

'I don't know that word,' she rejoined.

After a brief pause Edith raised her eyes and looked at Marina.

'It is the truth,' she said.

'The truth! Don't talk of the truth. Nobody knows what is the truth. Your father will have said to you that I insulted this gentleman.'

'Yes.'

'And that one night he disappeared?'

'Yes.'

'Disappeared completely? Did he not tell you his present whereabouts? Of course he did; you do not wish to repeat it to me, but your father certainly told you.'

'I imagine,' replied Edith, with a slight touch of offended pride,—'I imagine that my conversations with my father are a matter of indifference to you. I know that a Signor Silla, of Milan, is a friend of my father's, perhaps his only acquaintance in that city. This made me think that you were alluding to him, and I mentioned his name. Perhaps you will kindly tell me what it is you desire of me in the event of my meeting this gentleman.'

Marina stood for a moment lost in thought, with her forefinger on her chin, as though a 'yes' and a 'no' were contesting for mastery within her; then a flame of passion seemed to rise from the earth and enwrap the beautiful figure. She trembled from head to foot, her bosom rose and fell, her lips parted, there was a mysterious light in her eyes.

Edith started, expecting some strange utterance.

But the words came not. Her lips met, her person became composed, the strange light in the eyes died away.

'It is nothing,' said she, 'let us be going.'

Edith did not move.

'Come,' repeated Marina, 'you are too German. All I wish to know is where Signor Silla lives and what he is doing. Let me know quickly. Will you?'

'Even in Germany,' rejoined Edith, 'people have some understanding and some feeling. I have no wish to know your secret, but if there is any good service which I can render—'

'Ah, virtue! egotism!' said Marina. At this moment

a poor old woman, bending double beneath a great basket of hay, appeared in the path between the stables, stood still in front of Marina, and painfully raising her head towards her, with a benevolent smile, said, in a tone of surprise,—

'Good-day to your ladyships. You are taking a little walk?'

She was a living image of squalid misery, sprung from the fetid soil and ruined buildings, barefooted, with thin black legs like those of a bird of prey, her chin resting on either side upon a large, smooth, reddish goitre, and a tangled mass of grey locks hanging over her forehead. Her eyes were soft and clear.

'Poor woman, poor woman!' said Edith.

'Not so very poor either. Not that I am a lady, by no means, but my old man still earns something, and as long as I can, for I'm seventy-three years old and more, I want to carry my basket for another year or two. Besides, the Lord is over us two as well as others. And so, my service to you, ladies, and good luck to you. May you have a pleasant walk.'

She again bent her head beneath her load, and was about to renew, with shaking steps, her road among the flints and the heaps of broken tiles and filth. Marina pulled out her ivory-mounted purse and hastily thrust it into the woman's hand.

'Ah, holy Madonna!' exclaimed the old dame, 'I don't want it, dear lady. I have no need of it, indeed. Well, well,' she added, alarmed by a gesture and glance of Marina's. 'Ah, your ladyship, it is too much. Well, well, as your ladyship pleases. Ah, my lady!'

'Good day,' said Marina, and passed on.

Picking her way through the mass of filth and putre-

faction, she turned round; there was a kindly look on Edith's face.

'I am not a religious girl,' said Marina. 'I shall not expect this to be repaid to me by God. I don't make myself amiable to those I hate, with the noble object of acquiring a ticket to Paradise. For the rest, you can only do for me what I have already said; write to me where Signor Silla lives, and what he is doing.'

Edith said nothing.

'Are you afraid,' said Marina, 'that I wish to get him assassinated?'

'Oh, no; I know quite well that you don't love him,' replied Edith, smiling.

Marina felt her heart gripped by an ice-cold hand. At that moment she was passing the well. She rested her arms on the stonework and looked down into the water.

The word 'love' was ringing in her ears. 'Don't love,' Edith had said, but the negation had fallen unheeded, not so the magical word, love. It was with Marina as with some musical chord enclosing a certain note, silent until a voice passing through the room touches that same note among others, and then at once the whole chord vibrates with *love, love, love.* At the bottom of the well's black tube shone a little white disc broken by a dark human head. Marina, in a low tone, involuntarily called out,—

'Cecilia.'

The voice struck the echoing water, and travelled back again with a sinister booming sound. Marina stood up and resumed her way in silence.

They skirted the sides of the mountain, which here stretched away on the right down to the banks of the stream. The roar of the distant waterfalls, which they had heard at the stables, seemed to be carried straight

towards them by the wind from the valley; no mighty flow of water could be seen; they could only guess its whereabouts as being in a narrow gorge in front of them, shut in by more mountains, topped by dark clouds, and in a long, shady, winding chasm which descended from the gorge into the valley between dark, hanging woods, broken by red landslips, and bordered by a broad ring of small fields and green meadows shining in the sunlight.

At one side of the gorge would be seen a white church perched on a jutting rock, and beneath it a thick sprinkling of dark roofs and small huts nestling in the fields. Neat pasture lands were formed on the steep sides of the mountains to right and left, sprinkled with clumps of trees and dark with herds of cattle, whose tinkling bells formed one sweet, quivering voice. The pathway led down grassy slopes gay with flowers that waved in the fresh autumn breeze.

Marina stopped and looked towards the entrance to a cave at the head of the valley.

'It must be there,' she said.

'What?' asked Edith.

'The Horror. That noise comes from there. The Horror has a great fascination for me to-day.'

'Why?'

'Because I wish to go in there with my cousin. You are silent and unmoved. Can't you imagine what one's feelings would be in a cavern alone with him? Have you resisted my cousin's fascinating ways? Two eyes that go straight to the heart. And what wit! He is saturated with it, dear boy! And his elegant appearance. Why, he is a *Watteau*, is my cousin. He ought to be all red and white, a shape of golden cream, a *bonbon*. Don't you think so? Now, wouldn't you envy me if I became Countess Salvador?'

'I can see that you'll never be that.'

'Why so? I knew somebody who married out of hate.'

'But not out of contempt, I imagine.'

'Out of both together. They are two feelings which can very well find lodging in the same high heel of the same little shoe. The person I refer to made use of them to *fouler aux pieds* her husband, and many other odious and contemptible creatures.'

To Edith it appeared impossible that such language should be used on this lofty spot, amid the solemn purity of the mountains. She thought of her mother in her distant grave; if she could see her daughter in such company, if she could hear these speeches! But Edith was in no danger. She was not ignorant of evil, but she lived secure in her own conscious innocence. She allowed Marina to go on talking as she pleased.

'My friend was in love with somebody else. Are you shocked?'

Edith did not answer.

'Come, don't let us behave as though your worthy father or my uncle or some other person in trowsers were here. How old are you?'

'Twenty.'

'Very well. Then you must know pretty well what things go on in the world. Not a word; let me continue. I don't believe in certain kinds of innocence. Well, my friend had a lover, and wished, never mind why, to reach him by passing, with her little high-heeled boot, over a contemptible husband and a hateful family. Where is the harm? Men prohibit this and that. Well and good. Yet, by what right? Those whom God joins together let no man put asunder. That is about it, is it not? Very well. That is a beautiful idea and a grand

one. The priests are stupid with their versions of it. I ask you whether it is God who puts on surplice and stole, and mumbles half-a-dozen words to join together, at haphazard, two bodies and two souls. God joins them together before they love one another, before they see one another, before they are born. He carries them through space, the one to the other! Therefore, those who are joined together by some man, or by family arrangement, by calculation, by mistake, by a priest who knows not what he is doing, such as these God puts asunder. What was I saying? My friend passed on in hatred and contempt; thus she passed on.'

She stepped forward, her frame shaken with passion, and stamped with such energy upon the ground that Edith half expected to see sparks fly from it.

In the distance was heard a shrill voice,—

'Signora Donna Marina.'

It was the voice of Rico. He soon appeared running; on seeing his mistress he left off running and called out,—

'They say, will your ladyship be so good and—'

Marina hastily beckoned with her umbrella for him to come on.

He at once ceased calling out, broke into a run and arrived breathless, looking quite solemn with the responsibility of his office of ambassador, and his anxiety not to leave out any portion of his message.

'They say, will your ladyship be so good and walk on a little faster, because it is getting late and the Countess is waiting down below.'

'Where are they?' said Marina.

'One is not far off and is coming to meet you, and the others are at the cave.'

They had not gone far before they came across his

Excellency Nepo, sitting on his handkerchief on a bank by the roadside. He was looking about him with a frightened air, fanning himself with a little Japanese fan. When Rico, followed by the two ladies, appeared, he rose to his feet, and forgetting for a moment what was due to the ladies, he called out to the boy, without raising his hat,—

'Why didn't you wait for me, idiot?'

'He seems to have had some reason not to wait,' remarked Marina, coldly.

'You are very hard on me,' rejoined Nepo, in a low tone.

This suggestive tone of intimacy did not please Marina, who inquired drily,—

'How far is it to the Horror?'

'We shall be there in a few minutes,' muttered Rico, between his teeth.

'Gracious goodness, it's an eternity,' wailed Nepo. 'Not a very brilliant idea to make us take this frightful climb. Vezza and Finotti are half dead. I am a great walker, and I remember that when I was a student I walked up from Torreggia to the convent at Rua, no bagatelle, I can tell you; but here, I don't know why, but it's a different kind of walking. One gets more tired over a shorter course. How am I to express it? With us the mountains are more accommodating.'

He took advantage of a moment when Edith had stepped on one side to pluck a flower, and said to Marina, not without a touch of grievance in his tone and look,—

'And your answer?'

Marina looked at him.

'Very soon,' she said.

'When?'

'Come to the Horror with me.'

Nepo did not seem very well satisfied, but he could not ask for an explanation because Marina had her arm in Edith's, and he required all his breath to keep pace with them.

The commendatori and Ferrieri were seated near the door of the inn at C——, upon a bench drawn up against the wall, and were talking to an old bald-headed man in shirt sleeves, with a brick-coloured complexion, who was squatting on the doorstep of the hostelry, with a long pole between his bare legs. He was the worthy Charon of the Horror.

The Horror is only a few hundred yards from the village. The river rises a few miles higher up, the waters gather in bulk among the wild caves between the sloping sides of two mountains, then the river runs smoothly in the open for a brief distance, and then, near the village, falls from cascade to cascade till it reaches the end of the valley, and feebly expires in the lake at the point where the present company left their boats. Leaving C——, one soon came across a slight wooden bridge, the shadow of which falls across the river, here and there flecked with foam, across green pools and white pebbles. Leaving the bridge on the right, one keeps to the left along the bed of the river. Here the gentle stream runs laughing and babbling among the bright verdure of the virgin woods, though with a few shivering recollections of past fears. A few low rocks jut out from the banks, covered with dark mosses, blades of grass, and stately ciclami. Following the line of the river, one observes the two banks rise on the right and left against the sky, in two leafy masses of lofty woods gleaming in the sun; oaks, beeches, ash trees, sorb-trees, in tier upon tier, bending forward as though

to see the laughing waters pass, and waving their branches as though in applause. Soon after this the river makes a bend. No more sunshine, no more verdure, no more laughing waters; huge jaws of stone stand gaping wide open before you, causing you to halt when you hear the deep roar that issues from them, and feel the cold breath of that dark and monstrous gullet. The roar comes from the very entrails of the earth; the water passes through that rocky mouth in a dark, voluminous, but silent stream. A small leaky boat is here, chained to a ring fastened to the rock. It can carry two persons in addition to the boatman. One goes up the stream in this little boat, which apparently has no desire for the task. It twists its head now to the right, now to the left, and would slip away down the stream but for Charon's pole. The uproar increases, the light begins to fail. The boat passes between two lines of black rocks, enormous stalactites, here in swelling outline like some weird forest growth; there hollow, dripping, like inverted heads; but all in rows, at equal intervals, carved from base to summit with spiral lines. High above, the sky seems to shrink smaller and smaller between the rocks, till it finally disappers. The little boat enters a dark chasm which resounds with howls; it quivers from stern to stem, dashes against the rock on the right, dashes against it on the left, mad with terror, under the echoing arches of rock, whose entrails are gnawed away by the swiftly-flowing stream, and which rise, twisting and contorted, upwards. From the narrow rent in the leafy mantle of these rocks a greenish gleam, a spectral light which tinges the jutting points of rock, grows fainter as it passes from stone to stone, and dies away before reaching the dark green water beneath; it is like a ray of moonlight half hidden in clouds at day-

break. Through this gallery one enters the 'throne room,' a round, gloomy chamber with a mass of rock in the centre, like a rough pulpit or reading-desk for low Mass, standing upright between two enormous clouds of foaming water which encircle its sides, and stream on into a wide passage, all roar and flying mist, like two express trains passing side by side through a tunnel. It is from that rocky mass that the cavern takes its name of the throne room. One thinks of some prince of darkness seated upon that throne, lost in meditation, his glance fixed on the deep waters full of woe and wailing, full of tortured souls. Through a fissure behind the throne a bright jet of light irradiates the cave.

Charon shoved off the little boat from the rock to which it was chained, and with a powerful thrust sent it into midstream. Meanwhile, Rico was skipping like a wagtail over the rocks above water level, while some half-dozen urchins who had perched on a big stone behind the party, observed them gravely like a lot of little birds watching the movements of a big owl. Vezza, who knew little about scenic beauties, and Finotti, who knew nothing at all, noisily expressed their admiration of this awe-inspiring place. Ferrieri did not join the chorus of enthusiasm, and chatted quietly to Edith. He said that such scenes as these made him feel cold as ice ever since, when he was quite a boy, a poet had been crushed to death in the heart of this cavern, an unpleasant inmate in such a place. He added that he now, for the first time, had doubts whether that wretched being were in truth dead; he seemed to hear something moving about; he began to feel unusually hot—

'Forwards, ladies and gentlemen,' cried Marina.

Charon had just brought the small boat alongside, and he signed to the two ladies to get in.

'My cousin and I,' said Marina, 'will come last.'

'Then you and I will go first, Miss Edith.'

Thus saying, Ferrieri wrapped about the shoulders of his fair companion the blue shawl which she carried on her arm. Edith hardly noticed this; she seemed fascinated by the sombre beauty of the rocky pillars stretching away in front of her. They both got in and the boat moved away. The boat, passing through those gloomy arcades, made a pretty picture, with the bright blue shawl and the picturesque figure of the old boat man standing upright at the prow, with his long pole.

They soon disappeared, first Charon, then the blue shawl, then the brown lines of the little boat.

After about ten minutes they reappeared, the iron tipped pole, Charon, the blue shawl. 'Well? Well?' called out Vezza and Finotti.

There was no reply. As they stepped out, Edith and Ferrieri uttered a few cold words of admiration. Edith looked grave and sad; the engineer was blushing to the roots of his hair; the old boatman waited stolidly for his second boat-load. Edith remained near Marina, and Ferrieri walked away with downcast eyes. Finotti and Vezza went off in the boat together, unwillingly.

Nepo was ill at ease. He said nothing, but was continually on the move, looking here, looking there, and shaking his head to shake off the *pince-nez* which he no longer wore. Two or three times he even stepped into the water and passed over the rocks into the middle of the torrent to watch for the returning boats. When he was some way off, Marina said, *sotto voce*, to Edith, pointing towards Ferrieri,—

'He is like the others, eh? in spite of his gentlemanly ways! I knew as soon as you got out of the boat. Men are all alike!'

'It is a shame, it is a shame!' said the young girl, shuddering.

'Was he very rude?'

Edith blushed. 'Whoever is lacking in respect towards me, even for a moment, and with the slightest act, is very rude,' she replied.

'Signor Ferrieri,' said Marina, raising her voice. Ferrieri turned round. He tried to appear at his ease, and failed.

'Would you be so kind as to go down and join Countess Fosca. She must be very dull all alone. This young lady and I will come later on with the boy, probably by a different road.'

In Marina's ringing voice there was the instinctive resentment of a woman who finds a man, even if she does not care for him, at the feet of another woman. Ferrieri bowed and went away.

'What I have done is unusual,' said Marina to Edith. 'An old chaperon would hardly do such a thing. I did it on your account, to prevent your finding yourself again *tête-à-tête* with that bald-headed Lovelace who causes you such disgust; besides, I don't always trouble myself about what other people do.'

'Thank you,' said Edith.

The boat returned with the two commendatori.

'Count,' said Marina.

Nepo was on the point of replying 'Countess,' but only opened his lips, and then followed Marina into the boat.

'And Ferrieri?' asked Vezza.

'He has gone down the hill before us,' replied Marina.

But she was soon quite close to the bank, and her words could hardly be heard above the sullen roar of the stream.

She drew her shawl about her, turning her head to avoid the cold wind which sprinkled her with minute drops of the water dripping from the rocks. With dull eyes she gazed into the gloom, out of which issued the heavy, swift, silent, glassy river.

The boat approached the gloomy entrance to the 'throne room.' The face of the old man, standing at the prow as they passed among the black shining rocks, took a darker hue; the blows of the iron-tipped pole were drowned by the deafening roar of the hidden waterfalls. It was almost too dark to see. Nepo lent over towards Marina and took her hand.

'Ah!' she said, as though offended; but she did not withdraw her hand. Nepo pressed it within his own and felt happy; he knew not what to say; everything seemed already said; he kept on pressing that cold, inert hand, as though he wished to squeeze out of it an idea, a word, a phrase. Then he had an idea. He kept Marina's hand in his left, and with his right arm encircled her waist. Marina gave a shudder and threw herself forwards.

'Steady there, in Heaven's name!' roared the boatman. But one could now neither see nor hear. The unbroken roar of the water caused a painful contraction of chest and forehead.

Nepo released his embrace. He did not understand that sudden movement of Marina's. He talked to her; he felt as though he were talking with his head under water; but in his amazement he went on talking.

Then he felt Marina's waist again fall back against his arm. He quivered with delight, and eagerly spread out the fingers which lay across her bosom, like the claw of some impure animal gathering courage from the darkness; he spread out his fingers in the desire to embrace the whole of her voluptuous person, to pass below her

draperies and grasp the warm, living form beneath. Marina had thrown herself back in the blind desire to crush that arm, which stung her like a whip, and she turned upon Nepo to insult him, but he could neither hear nor see. The water, the wind, the very stones, shrieked a hundred times louder, ever louder and louder still. They crushed in their wrath, in their gigantic anguish, the petty anger, the contemptible troubles of humanity. They crushed the words and flung them away in confusion, like dust before the wind. Brutal, all-powerful nature wished to be heard alone. Nepo felt the warm bosom of Marina fall and rise, heaving beneath his touch; he seemed to distinguish amid the uproar a faint human voice; he imagined words of love, as he breathed in the intoxicating perfume of her dress, and his lips sought hers in the darkness.

Just then a vigorous shove with the pole made the boat swing round the last corner of the dark passage and emerge into a greenish light, which seemed to rise out of the clear water. Nepo had not time to see Marina's face. The old boatman had turned round towards them. Nepo quickly let go of Marina, and pretended to be gazing up at the roof. The old boatman had moored the boat against a rock, by pressing the tip of his pole against the opposite wall, and soon waved his free arm with vigorous gestures, as he pointed out the cavities and weird excrescences of the rocks.

'Splendid!' cried Nepo.

Charon touched his ear and shook his forefinger in negation; then he spread out his hand and waved it up and down, nodding at the same time with his head, as though to promise something yet more beautiful, and again took to his pole.

Marina, pale, with lips pressed together, her shawl

wrapped tightly about her, seemed like some sinful soul, which in disdain had sought refuge in the shadows of these infernal regions, her nervous tension yielding place to stupefaction.

The 'throne-room' opened out in front of the boat like a vision of greenish gold, with its huge unpolished cupola; the black rock in the centre, the thundering stream foaming and boiling along the stalactite-covered walls. But the boat, instead of going there, turned aside to the right and glided into a quiet bay of smooth water, where it grounded on the sand. A gigantic breakwater of stone descended from the roof and formed this little channel, which it sheltered on one side from the roar of the torrent.

By speaking loud one could here make oneself heard. The boatman asked Marina whether she liked the Horror, adding, with an air of kindly sympathy, that all the gentlefolk liked it. For his own part, the only thing he admired in it were the trout. He added that there were a great many just there, and wanted Nepo and Marina to turn round and look down into the water, promising that they would see some flash along the bottom. Nepo, turning round, just brushed against Marina's glove.

'Don't touch me,' said she, harshly, without looking at him.

He attributed this remark to the fact that they were now in a bright ray of light, and the only notice he took of it was to say roughly to the boatman,—

'What do we want with your trout, idiot? Shove off!'

His ill-bred insolence to his inferiors had once got him a cuff on the head from a waiter in a *café* at Turin, and might have got him something worse from Charon; but the latter only caught the last two words, and again guiding

the boat into midstream, poled it into the big cave, and fastening it against the 'throne,' where the water was calmer, he resumed his *rôle* of silent cicerone.

With a wave of his hand he showed them that they could climb up into the rock, and thence, through a cleft up in the rocky roof, escape from the Horror. Marina threw away her shawl, jumped on to the seat of the boat, and rejecting all assistance from the astonished boatman, she found a foothold on the jutting edges of the rock, and in two bounds was on the top. From there she imperiously signed to Nepo to follow her. Nepo, standing up in the boat, began to feel the rock with his hands, wavered, then glanced sideways at the boatman. The latter lifted Nepo up bodily and placed him against the rock, and when, by clutching at it with hands and feet, he had got a firm hold, shoved him up from behind with the palms of his hands till he reached the top.

The water, which entered in a flashing, thundering stream through the cleft in the rock, divided at the back of the throne into two foaming branches, which then girt it about. From the throne one passed across to the open air by a long, narrow plank laid upon jutting rocks. This path was used by the trout fishers.

Marina, followed by Nepo, stepped along the plank, after telling the boatman to wait for them.

At the exit from the Horror they came upon a scene so rugged that it would have seemed one of desolation, had one not just left the cavern below. The torrent rushed down in an open stream over huge stone steps, flashing in the sunshine like a net of silver thread, in large, irregular rings, and then thundered on through two high, jutting crags, which seemed about to close, one on the top of the other, half quite bare, half clothed in ragged tatters of woodland verdure.

Marina climbed up to some stunted yew trees, which, with their black foliage, brushed against a huge rock beside the mouth of the Horror, where the terrible roar partly died away.

Nepo followed her with great difficulty, clutching hold of tufts of grass with his hands. He halted a few paces from Marina to take breath.

'Stop there,' she said. 'You have more courage in the dark.'

'Oh, well,' said Nepo, 'I am not going to stop now.'

'Stop where you are!'

Nepo stood still with clouded brow, ill at ease.

At first he had imagined that she wished to procure an interview away from the prying eyes of the boatman. Now he did not understand it. He was irritated with Marina; but in the last few minutes he had had a new feeling, or rather a new sensation.

From the little velvet hand, from the warm, heaving bosom that he had clasped, an unwonted commotion had passed through his frame, unwonted in him, who boasted that he was a man among women and an angel among ladies.

Both were silent for a minute.

'And so you wish it?' said Marina.

'Ah!' replied Nepo, stretching out his arm.

A new pause.

'Why do you wish it?'

'What a thing to ask, great Heavens!'

'Isn't it?' said she, smiling; 'you are right.'

She looked at him with that penetrating glance of hers which appeared and disappeared at will. Then raising her voice, she said,—

'But I don't love you.'

'Oh, my own darling!' said Nepo, not catching the

'don't,' as he clambered up to where she stood. She stepped back in surprise.

'I don't love you,' she repeated.

Nepo turned pale and grew silent; then he broke forth in a low, excited voice,—

'You don't love me? What do you mean?—you don't love me? And five minutes ago, in that boat, in the dark.'

'Really! Did you think so?'

'Oh, good Heavens! If that boat could only speak!'

'It would speak ill of you. You have made a mistake; I don't care for you.'

Nepo looked at her with arched eyebrows and parted lips.

'And yet I accept you,' she said.

Nepo uttered a smothered 'ah!' his face brightened, and he held out his hands towards her.

'Well, are you satisfied?' said she.

Nepo wished to reply by kissing her, but she was in a mood to hit him in the chest with her parasol.

'Go back at once,' she said; 'the boatman might go away. I am not coming with you; I am going round the Horror, outside. No, I am not coming. You come with me? I don't want your company. Go along! Aren't you happy now? Tell Signorina Steinegge and the boy to wait for me at the bridge. Don't wait for us at dinner, even. But when you get home, tell your mother, tell my uncle. Soon, before I return. Be off.'

He did not like the idea. He begged and prayed for a kiss, but didn't get one; even her little velvet hand, even the hem of her garment he asked to press to his lips, and was refused.

He seized her parasol and kissed that; it was at least hers. The water and the leaves of the forest laughed

at him, and he went away, contented and discontented at the same time; agitated by that confused poetry of sensations which is something above ordinary desire, and which, at least once in a lifetime, plants in each soul its own vital energy, its own sad, transient bloom.

When Marina reached the bridge she found Edith and Rico waiting for her. They silently retraced the road which they had gone over that morning until they reached an old stone upon which was inscribed, with an arrow pointing accordingly, 'To the mountains.' Here they followed a little path leading towards a little hill in a dip in the mountains between the cluster of bare rocks above C——, and some wooded mountain ridges.

They had got near the hill, when Marina, who was leading, suddenly stood still, and said brusquely,—

'I have been honest, you know.'

Edith did not understand, and made no reply.

She did not enter into the feverish emotions which quivered in the voice and shone in the eyes of Marina. All her own mind was absorbed in the contemplation of the valley, which offered an ever-changing spectacle; glimpses of the sky which opened out amid the undulating-lines of green tree tops, which in turn mingled with blue mountain summits; the tremulous note of the sheep-bells among the pastures, the clear, solemn sound of water flowing along distant valleys and smiling meadows, then crossing a road and disappearing in the distance.

She began to walk more slowly, looking at the sky so still and clear above the rugged mountains, which, brilliant in the rays of the sun, towards which they all seemed to be looking, appeared united in some mighty thought, in some sublime prayer without words. She sighed, and, as she did so, felt that silent spirit of the

mountains enter her heart. She failed to understand how one could think of aught else. She no longer felt, as in the morning, the malign influence of Marina; she was free. Reaching the mountain ridge, she said, as she looked down at the scene which opened out before her,—

'It is a piece of poetry.'

Marina did not open her lips. Edith noticed, as she went up to her, that her eyes were full of tears. She stood still, surprised.

Marina forcibly seized her by the arm, and, giving Rico a sign to go on ahead, left the pathway and began walking rapidly over an adjoining meadow. Suddenly she flung her arms round her companion's neck, and burst into heart-rending sobs. She sobbed and sobbed, as she leant on Edith's slight shoulder, convulsively pressing her arm, speaking with her lips touching her dress, and every now and then violently shaking her head. Edith, greatly moved, was trembling from head to foot. She heard the resonant sound of that choking voice, and was unable to distinguish a single word; her heart was filled with pity, as though it had understood all that was being sobbed out above it; she felt an overpowering need of finding words of comfort, and she could think of none. She kept repeating, 'Calm yourself, calm yourself,' but without effect, for Marina only shook her head more violently than ever. She bent down and laid her lips against her hair, hesitating a moment, struggling with some secret thought; finally she kissed that haughty head, now so greatly humiliated, and at once felt consolation, as from a victory gained. Little by little the fit of sobbing passed away. Marina slowly raised her head, and released Edith from her embrace.

'It is over,' she said, 'thank you.'

'Talk to me,' said Edith, affectionately; 'if you could only see into my heart.'

'I have talked to you,' replied Marina, 'I have told you all.'

She again gave two or three convulsive, tearless sobs. Edith begged her to sit down. 'No, no,' she replied, 'it is over.' She bit her lip till the blood came, and repeated hurriedly, 'It is over, it is over.' She was leaning against a great white mass of rock, which the winter frosts had carved and fretted like lace work, and which projected above the grass, among the brambles, like the huge shoulder of some fossil monster only half buried. Marina was standing with her back against the stone, her head turned over her right shoulder, with her eyes fixed on the hand which she had twined and twisted among the weird fretwork of the stone.

'But tell me,' said Edith.

Marina turned her head and plucked the blue flower from a long stalk near her.

'What flower is it?' said she, brusquely; 'it looks like wolfsbane,' and she held it out to Edith. The latter took the flower without looking at it, she was going to press her to tell her more. Marina was again seized with a violent, nervous paroxysm. This time she clung to the rock, and smothered her sobs against it. She seemed to desire to enter the stone and freeze there, and grow stiff and cold for ever.

And around her all was peace!

The cows' bells filled with their tremulous music the solemn silence of the mountains, made the sounds of innocent life resound across the pastures and across the neat copses with the green and gold tints of the young beech trees, as the poor beasts went round the scattered metal drinking troughs filled with stagnant water. Near

the big stone, the wolfsbane raised its handsome flowers in the fading sunlight, and the ferns curved their bright spring fronds, and the vain ciclami raised their tall stalks bare of flowers. Everything around Marina spoke of peace, of grave and solemn quietude.

Far off one could hear the voice of Rico calling,—

'Uuh-hup! Uuh-hup!'

And the voices of the herdsmen in reply,—

'Uuh-hup! Uuh-hup!'

It sounded like a farewell to the sun, whose departing rays had left the grass, and were now lighting up the top of the white rock. The scattered tremulous music of the bells approached from all sides towards C——, which nestled in a grassy valley beneath the jutting mass of bare rocks. The cows were walking along in rows, in little troops, one close behind the other on the narrow path, trotting down the little sloping hillocks, breaking away gently from the main body as they reached the meadows, now and then halting to raise their heads and low.

Rico kept on shouting,—

'Uuh-hup!'

Marina gave a start, turned to Edith and said,—

'Let us be going. Now it is really over.'

Edith once more begged her to tell her all about it, to confide in her.

'I have told you all,' Marina replied once more. 'I could not again repeat what I said. I do not feel it as I did then. Let us suppose that there was in me a feeling, of whose existence I was ignorant. All of a sudden it has flamed up, has seized me by the throat, in the brain, all over. It was but a flame of fire which now is dead. I do not feel it any more. I know not whether it was grief or fear. As you know, when one enters upon

an unknown path, the doubt often arises, "If I am making a mistake? If I lose my way?" It does not last, but it comes. Listen to what I am going to say: If in the future you hear people speak ill of me, say things against me, remember this evening. Then perhaps you will understand.'

'I hope I shall never hear people saying things against you.'

'Ah!'

When they regained the road they found Rico patiently waiting for them. It was late, the evening was chilly. They hastily walked down the hill towards Val ——. Marina did not speak, she was wrapt in her own thoughts. After they had walked thus for half an hour, and not till then, Marina took hold of Edith's arm and said,—

'You must tell him.'

'Tell whom?' replied Edith.

Marina gave a shiver, let go of Edith's arm, and said no more.

The white rock eaten away by the frost, rising up among the brambles, the ferns, and the wolfsbane, beneath the pale evening sky, divined, perchance, through what secret sorrows that body and soul had come to fling themselves against his hard, cold, pitiless sides. If there slumbered within him the dull troubled spirit, the *insensatum cor* of the mountains, he could dream how another spirit, but newly linked to wickedness and misfortune, had hastened to knock roughly, almost to shatter itself against him, in an impetus of horrible grief, welling up from depths beyond human knowledge to fathom. He could dream how much suffering exists, even beyond his own blind prison-house, in the long-desired world of sensation, thought, and love. The bells of the cattle could now no longer be heard, from

the valley light flecks of mist began to rise, and from the Horror rose, like some deep lament, the voice of the river, while up there, far above, stood the white rock, growing ever more sad, ever more gloomy, among the brambles, the ferns, and the wolfsbane, beneath the pale evening sky.

CHAPTER V

A DECREE OF FATE

It was striking eight o'clock as Edith and Marina arrived at the stone steps between the cypresses. The stars were shining, but the huge old trees hid them to such an extent that Rico, like a good cavalier, halted, and called out at the top of his voice,—'Lights there!' After which he sprang down the steps like a cat into the darkness beyond.

A light appeared in the loggia, and a voice cried out, 'Here I am.'

Then the light disappeared.

'Oh, Miss Fanny!' replied the boy, 'bring the light here. Make haste!'

The light quickly reappeared in the courtyard.

Edith and Marina, as they slowly descended the hill, could hear a conversation going on between Rico and Fanny, and, from time to time, the voice of Countess Fosca. Fanny had a candle and Rico a small lantern. The Countess kept on saying, 'Haven't you found Momolo? Haven't you found Momolo?'

'No, my lady, we have found no Momolos about here. Do you take the candle, Miss Fanny, and I will go on with the lantern.'

Fanny and the Countess approached the flight of steps.

'Marina!' called out her Excellency.

'Countess,' replied the still invisible Marina.

'Haven't you come across my son, darling? Haven't you found Momolo? Good heavens, what a Calvary of a staircase! I am surprised about Momolo, because I sent him out to meet you only five minutes ago. My son went out half an hour since. Wait a moment, you there with the light! Who are you, my sweet youth? What a miserable broken down set of steps these are! Ah, here we are. Where are you, Marina? Come here, dear child! Hold up that candle, in Heavens name! Dear me, Marina, I can't see you yet!'

Rico passed by her with the small lantern, taking the steps three at a time. Presently he halted and quickly re-descended the steps. Behind the lantern gleamed some large steel buttons which the Countess knew. She rushed forward and embraced Marina.

She kissed her warmly several times, and whispered in her ear,—

'God bless you, my sweet pet, it has been my heart's desire.'

And she kept on kissing her.

Marina said nothing. Edith asked Fanny whether her father was at home. Fanny did not know.

'No, my treasure,' said the Countess, moving away from Marina. 'He went out a few minutes ago with one of those three Kings of the East; not the stupid owl who wanted to make me go into the Horror this morning; the other one, the tall man from the city.'

Countess Fosca never, or hardly ever, remembered the names of recent acquaintances. She always spoke of the man with the long nose, the man with the crooked mouth, the man with the spectacles.

As soon as Marina had been released from the

for the Salvadors and afraid of Marina. Hearing the voice of Nepo, who came storming down the steps with Rico and Momolo, she at last roused herself and entered the house with another thought occupying her mind. She was thinking of Ferrieri. The latter had not been so daring as Marina imagined. He had been struck by Edith's quiet and intellectual style of beauty, and by her demeanour, which was so different from that of other girls of his acquaintance, who were all either too shy or too fast. He began to dream that he had discovered a woman who resembled the lofty ideal which he cherished in a corner of his mind kept apart from artizans, machines and railroads, apart from his pupils, his instructors, and his cold scientific learning. It seemed to him that to have this girl thrown in his way when he was forty-two was Fortune's last offer to him, and all his dried-up youth was revived and renewed within him. He had nearly made up his mind to speak to Steinegge before speaking to Edith. In the darkness of the Horror, standing at her side, he lost his self-possession, seized her hands forcibly and spoke to her, and what he said was drowned in the roar of the water. The violence with which she repelled him, and the expression on her face, made him understand how greatly he had offended her. Too late, it dawned upon him how easily, in such a place, a violent declaration of love might be misinterpreted. Edith had, in fact, misinterpreted it, and she was now wondering why her father had gone out walking with Ferrieri, a thing he had never done before.

Meanwhile Nepo arrived on the scene, greatly enraged at having missed Marina, and calling out 'It is impossible, it is impossible,' he passed by Edith in the hall without bowing to her, while Rico stood at the door with his

lantern, laughing to his heart's content, and old Momolo muttered,—'Eh, you young monkey, be more respectful to his Excellency.'

On the stairs Nepo ran up against Fanny, who was coming down to find Edith and tell her that dinner was ready.

'Where is the Marchioness?' he asked without stopping.

'Where is she?' replied Fanny, running down about a dozen steps. 'In her room,' she shouted from the bottom of the stairs, when Nepo was already on the first floor landing, where his mother impatiently awaited him.

'Where is she?' said he, *sotto voce*. 'What did she say to you? Does she know that you spoke to Count Cæsar?'

All these questions the Countess met with an equal number of her own.

'Where have you been all this time? How did you lose your way? Did you find Momolo? Go and tell her that I have spoken to the old man. Quick! They have gone to tell her dinner is ready. She hasn't come down yet. She must be in her room. Wait for her in the loggia. Off with you!'

What strange spirit of unrest had stolen in between the stones of the castle walls? Everybody was as nervous and excited as Nepo and Countess Fosca. Signor Paolo was storming about the kitchen in a great huff at having to serve up a second dinner. Catte had got a scolding from the Countess about some button or other, and wandered hither and thither looking for something, muttering to herself that she had never known her ladyship so cross-grained as she was that evening. A servant ran up and down stairs from the kitchen to the dining-

room with plates, bottles, and glasses, desperately kicking open the doors with his feet. Ferrieri and Steinegge had returned from their walk, both greatly agitated. Count Cæsar, Finotti and Vezza were discussing in the drawing-room the announcement of the September Concordat. Vezza ridiculed it with the cold sarcasms of a disinterested looker-on, flavoured with a touch of clerical bitterness. Finotti, a future member of the standing commission, bitterly attacked it, and Count Cæsar, with the ideas of a Roman patrician of the old school, condemned it as a miserable confession of weakness, an admission to the enemy that 'I am not only afraid of your arms, but even of your shadow,' and he spoke hotly against the King, the ministry, the parliament, and the classes in power; for by such measures they offered a pretext for the renewed activity of a blockheaded and vainglorious democracy. Count Cæsar spoke more bitterly than was his wont, fearing that Finotti and Vezza might take him for an ally, and in the course of his invectives he spared the political friends of neither the one nor the other.

Marina, although they had sent to fetch her down to dinner, was still sitting in her bedroom at the little round table which she sometimes used as a writing-table, with her elbows resting upon it, and her forehead hidden in her hands. The lighted candle which stood in front of her made her hair flash with threads of gold, and showed up the fine blue veins at the side of the white forehead, now half concealed by a small rosy finger; and threw across the shining pieces of furniture scattered about the dark room faint reflected rays of light, like the eyes of spirits watching over the pensive girl. On the blue velvet pad of a writing-desk which was open in front of her lay a sheet of dark grey paper with a large gold monogram,

four letters luxuriously intertwined; and, underneath, a troop of flies' legs drawn up in order of battle, and farther down, at the captain's post, a single name—*Giulia.* The flies' legs spoke as follows:—

'Do you know that I am moving too? I move my capital from Via Bigli to Borgonovo. Such was the Emperor's will. Yesterday I paid a flying farewell visit to my dear old road with its pretty gardens. What a horrible nuisance it is to move one's capital! I left His Majesty in the midst of the packers and upholsterers, and came back here to send you a *petit pâté chaud.* It is a little parcel of novels, very well written, and in the middle is Signor Corrado Silla, author of '*A Dream,*' domiciled at Milan, Via San Vittore.

'I will tell you the chapter of accidents which led to my finding him some other day, when I may be able to tell you something else as well.

'*Adieu, ma belle au bois dormant.* To-morrow I have to travel on business; I am going to a dance at Bellagio. *Poor myosotis!* Who remembers them now? This time I shall be in white. I shall wear coral, and some magnificent sea-weeds from the Baltic which G—— is sending me from Berlin, with a sonnet. I shall not wear the sonnet. GIULIA.'

There was a knock at the door, and Fanny was heard saying,—

'Is your ladyship not coming? Are you not well?'

'I am coming,' replied Marina. She jumped to her feet, and with an impulse of haughty enjoyment raised her arms above her head, raised her triumphant face, and looked up and in front of her. She hurried out of the room, glided downstairs, and in the loggia came across Nepo, much agitated.

At last, my angel,' he said. 'Mamma has spoken to your uncle. He is very pleased. And you—'

He put one arm round her waist and waited for her reply.

'Happy,' said she, and slipped away from him with one of her silvery little laughs, which echoed through the loggia, and through another door into the drawing-room. Here everybody, Count Cæsar excepted, rose to their feet, as she passed lightly through the room with a bow and smile.

'Atalanta, Atalanta,' said Commendatore Vezza, looking after her. Nepo came in headlong, looking very red, his eyes starting out of his head. He stumbled in the doorway, and fell into Vezza's arms to save himself from falling.

'Pardon me, my dear Commendatore,' he said, in an impertinent, mocking tone; 'I was hoping to embrace something nicer.'

'Confound the cad,' said Vezza to himself. 'Really?' he remarked drily.

'Isn't it true, uncle?' Nepo resumed, with an emphasis on the *uncle*. 'You can imagine whom I was hoping, with good right, to embrace. Gentlemen, you are at liberty to draw from what I say, from everything that I have said, the most just, the most—reasonable inferences.'

He dragged out the words, hesitating over the adjective, then throwing it out with an oratorical flourish.

'The most—natural inferences! I imagine that I can hardly find a more expressive phrase.'

And he passed on in triumph into the dining-room.

The Count could refrain no longer.

'Miserable popinjay,' he muttered, between his teeth, in Piedmontese.

'Ugh!' puffed the indignant Vezza.

'But,' remarked Finotti, indicating the dining-room by jerking his thumb over his shoulder, and with a significant look.

The Count said nothing.

'But may we be allowed?' resumed Finotti, holding out his hand.

'Bah!' exclaimed the Count.

Was this a denial, or merely a contemptuous rejection of the proffered congratulations? Nobody ventured to inquire. Only the voices in the dining-room were to be heard. There, Countess Fosca and Nepo were helping Marina and Edith to some dinner. Edith felt she was in the way, and only waited for the end of dinner to rejoin her father. The latter kept walking backwards and forwards before the open door, casting curious glances at his daughter.

'What a charming neighbourhood this is, cousin,' said Nepo, with a sudden inspiration; 'the Horror, for example. One can never forget it.' He looked at Marina with his large, weak, prominent eyes, leaning his elbows on the table. 'It makes my heart beat fast to think of it. This night sleep will desert me. It is useless for you to try to understand, mamma. You are not capable of understanding the secret spell of that grotto. Ah!'

He got up and waved his arms about like a madman in an ecstasy; then he kissed his mother, who cried out,—

'You mad boy, leave me alone with your foolish jests.'

'Listen to what I am going to say, mamma,' he went on, while the Countess kept on saying to Marina,—

'He is beside himself with joy.'

Marina called out to Finotti, who was peeping in from the next room.

'We don't want him,' said the Countess.

'Finotti,' repeated Marina.

The latter entered with the brisk walk of a young man.

'Listen to what I am going to say,' cried the infatuated Nepo.

'Here, Finotti.'

Marina made him sit down between Edith and herself.

'Now listen. I was so carried away by the beauties of the Horror, that when my cousin and I arrived at the big black rock in the last cave, I, although a stranger to the noble exercise of gymnastics, made a jump.'

'Oh!' interposed Marina.

'Isn't it a fact that I leapt it?' rejoined Nepo, looking at her, with both hands raised.

'Quite a new way of leaping,' replied Marina.

'Oh, do be so good, Marina, and don't talk French to me, my dear; it's become a perfect nuisance at Venice, and destroys the pleasure of life. What did you say just now?'

'Another of your *faux pas*, mamma! Marina was speaking in English, not French.'

'Pardon me,' interposed Finotti to soothe the poor Countess, who had turned very red, and was pouring out a glass of Barolo to comfort her. 'Pardon me, Count. What does it matter, French or English? When one has the good fortune to be born with aromatic honey in one's mouth, the honey of that sweet dialect made for the Graces in the school of Venus, why spoil one's palate with French and English? The Countess is right.'

'Well, I didn't think you had it in you. No, I really didn't think you had it in you. That is right. Stand up for me, for a poor old woman like me. Let our language be as it may, at anyrate it is not full of bones and thorns like other languages. Don't they say that our forefathers,

peace to their souls! spoke Venetian even to the Pope? I am not of noble birth, but at anyrate I am an old Venetian. My great-grandfather died in his fishing-boat in the Adriatic, and my grandfather was in the service of his Excellency, Anzolo Emo. I will talk Turkish, but not French, and I don't know any English. My poor Alvise was of the same way of thinking. May I turn Mahomedan if I have ever spoken two words of anything but Venetian. But now that is not the fashion. Now the fashion is to be ashamed of being Venetian. Go to B——'s, or D——'s, or G——'s, and you will see how things are done. No, no, no; I am not talking about foreigners, we have to bear with them. But among ourselves? Sh, sh, sh, shu, shu, shu? All sibilants and gutturals. Bah!'

Here Countess Fosca paused for breath and a sip of the Barolo, but she had hardly raised the glass to her lips when she put it down again, spluttering and gasping, amidst the merriment of Nepo, who during her long speech had managed to empty half the salt cellar into her wine.

'I called you in as a man of wit among these witty people,' said Marina in a low tone to Finotti.

'Ah, Marchesina,' replied the latter, with a sigh; 'what is the use of wit? I would rather be an imbecile, and twenty-five years old.'

Meanwhile the Countess and Nepo were making such an uproar that Count Cæsar, Vezza and Steinegge came into the dining-room. Ferrieri looked in at the door but did not come in, in fact he took the opportunity of slipping away unobserved, and did not appear again for the rest of the evening.

On seeing her uncle enter, Marina rose from the table and made her way to the drawing-room, leaning on Nepo's arm.

'You are a nice boy with your long jumps,' she said to him, laughing.

While he was making a solemn reply, *ore rotundo*, the two passed in front of Count Cæsar, and Marina looked him straight in the face, with eyes which sparkled with merriment. Countess Fosca, who was still angry at the practical joke played upon her by her son, passed on without looking at him, fanning herself as she walked.

The Count pulled out his watch. It was half-past nine, an extraordinarily late hour for him.

'These ladies and gentlemen must be in need of rest,' he said, turning round to Steinegge and the commendatori. Then, without waiting for a reply, he ordered candles and went into the drawing-room, where he made the same remark.

'I think,' said he to the Salvadors, 'that after so many fatigues and so much excitement you must be in need of repose.'

'But, my dearest uncle,' began Nepo, walking up to him with short, hasty steps.

The Count did not let him proceed.

'There is no doubt about it. Nonsense,' he said, 'they are lighting the candles now.'

Nepo turned right round and looked towards Marina, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows.

Countess Fosca intervened.

'Come, come, Cæsar,' she said in a low voice. 'What a curious man you are. This evening, just when my children would so like to talk to you, to tell you—'

'Yes, yes, quite so,' the Count hastened to reply; 'I quite understand, I quite understand. Here are your candles.'

There was nothing more to be said.

'And you,' said the Count, finding himself alone with Marina; 'are not you going to bed?'

'Have you nothing to say to me? Are you not glad that I have followed your advice?'

'My advice? What do you mean—my advice?'

'But certainly.'

They were standing ten paces apart, looking at one another out of the corners of their eyes.

'Explain yourself,' said the Count, and hastily putting down the candlestick which he had taken up, he turned and faced her.

On a little marble table against the wall, and close to Marina, stood a crystal vase, filled with sprays of oleander and cut flowers. She turned aside her head, saying, 'Don't you remember?' and buried her face in the sweet, dying blossoms.

'I?' replied the Count. 'I gave you advice?'

Marina raised her head from the flowers.

'Yes, you,' she said; 'a few hours before the Salvadors arrived. I was in the library. You said that we two were not made to live together. That your cousin was a man of great position, and was thinking of getting married, and that I had better give the matter my consideration.'

'Well, well; I may have said that,' replied the Count, in embarrassment, running his fingers through his hair. 'But at that time I did not know my cousin in the least, and you have not thought fit to consult me before accepting his proposal.'

'Well, I do know him. I consider him a perfect gentleman, very clever, very refined. very vivacious, a most charming man, as indeed you find him yourself.'

'As I find him?'

'Certainly. Didn't you tell the Countess last night that you were very glad about my engagement?'

'Of course. Since you have not elected to take my opinion, and have decided for yourself, I am very glad. But I hasten to mention—'

The Count was interrupted by the entrance of Catte.

'Gracious goodness!' exclaimed the latter, greatly surprised, and beginning to withdraw. 'I beg your pardon. I thought there was nobody here. I came to fetch her Excellency's fan.'

'There are no fans here,' said the Count, brusquely, giving her a glance which made her quail.

'No, your lordship, no, your lordship,' murmured poor, innocent Catte, and her thin figure and long nose disappeared through the doorway.

'I hasten to mention,' resumed the Count, after a moment's silence, 'that I gave you no advice whatever.'

Marina smiled.

'But I thank you for your advice,' she said. 'I am perfectly happy.'

The Count would have liked to get angry, and could not. It was true enough that Marina had made her decision without first asking his advice; but he had on his conscience the words which he had spoken in the library, and which she now brought to his remembrance. He was not a man to juggle with his conscience to keep it quiet. Those words now recurred to him for the first time; he exaggerated their significance, and regretted having uttered them.

'And you are happy?'

'To say I am not would come rather late now, but I am perfectly happy, I said so just now.'

'Listen to me, Marina.'

It was long since the Count had spoken to his niece with the grave, affectionate manner with which he uttered those four words. The child of his dear, dead sister had

come to a decision which estranged her from him for ever. He did not believe that she would be happy, and now he feared to be himself in some measure responsible for this marriage of ill augury. He feared that he had allowed himself to be carried away, and that he had used imprudent language in his resentment at the wrongs inflicted on him by his niece, in his desire to see no more of her, to hear her irritating voice no longer. This feeling, firmly fixed as it had been in his mind up to the present moment, now that it was on the point of being gratified, began to die away.

As Marina did not stir, he himself advanced a few paces towards her, and said,—

'I am thinking of what your dignity demands under the present circumstances.'

'My dignity?'

'Certainly, your dignity. You are about to enter a very wealthy family. You must do so with your head high.' The Count's right hand was half raised, as though instinctively waiting for another hand to meet it. But the expectation was not realised, and the hand slowly dropped back to his side. Uncle and niece remained for a moment motionless, face to face. Then he took up a candle and went to wind up the clock on the chimney-piece.

Meanwhile Marina took up the other candle and silently left the room, without the Count, who was carefully turning the key, appearing to notice her. She did not close the door behind her; but she had hardly gone out when the Count left off winding the clock, and turned round, looking for a few moments at the half-opened door. Then he finished winding up the clock, and in his turn left the room, with bowed head, lost in thought, on his way to bed.

The stern old castle passed through an unquiet night. More than one closed shutter was lined with light; from more than one door whispering voices escaped, crossing one another in the empty corridors, on the deserted stairs. So, when in silence and solitude we compose ourselves to rest, our secrets come out from their hidden cells and wander whispering about our minds.

Steinegge was in his daughter's room. He had just brought her a great piece of news; a formal demand for her hand, made a few hours before, by the engineer Ferrieri. Poor Steinegge was feverish with excitement. He felt, in a confused way, that, having regard to the worth and to the social standing of Ferrieri, the match was a very good one for his daughter; he felt also that the engineer was an honest man, the conversation he had just had with him having persuaded him of that. Ferrieri had frankly opened his heart to him, telling him about the incident in the Horror, expressing the hope that Edith would accept his explanations, and speaking of her with the touching respect of a boy of sixteen. He had gone on to speak of himself and his family, explaining everything at length, and concealing nothing, either good or bad; and he had sketched the quiet but luxurious life which he was able to offer to Edith. Steinegge felt that he would lose his daughter, at least to a great extent; the thought grieved him deeply, and at the same time he felt angry with himself at his egotism and selfishness. He had made it a point of honour to magnify the man, and all that he had said to Edith. But he was too much agitated to be able to explain himself properly. He had completely spoilt Ferrieri's speech, turning it upside down, overloading it with exclamations—'A fine fellow! a noble character!' getting confused, and starting afresh every minute.

When he had finished, Edith came and laid her hands on his shoulders.

'What do you advise, father?' she said.

Poor Steinegge was not in a condition to reply verbally, but he made a vigorous gesture—a desperate sign of affirmation—with head and arms. At last, by force of will, he was able to ejaculate these three words,—

'A good match.'

Edith laid her head on his shoulder. She could not utter what was in her heart while he could see her face.

'There is someone who says to me: he has lost his country—he has lost his old friends—he has lost his youth, but I am happy because you are at my post by his side, and you will give him all your love—all your life.'

'Oh, no! no! no!' interposed Steinegge.

'That is what she says to me, father. And she adds: you will not leave your father now if—' here Edith lowered her voice—'if you hope that we shall all be united one day more happily—far more happily than in the weary years during which your father endured so much fatigue—so much suffering, for me and for you.'

Steinegge threw his arms round his daughter, repeating,—

'No! no! no!'

'But also, father,' said Edith, again raising her face, now calm and happy; 'there is another little matter. I do not like this gentleman.'

'Oh, that cannot be! Just think, my child, it might be possible for us to live together all the same.'

'No, no. You know quite well that I should have to be his wife first, and your daughter afterwards. Just think

of that! and all our schemes! our little house! our little excursions? Besides, really and truly, I can forgive Signor Ferrieri, if you wish it, but I do not care for him. You will speak to him in this way: The young lady, my daughter, can only accept your explanations. You will say that, won't you, father?'

'No; it is impossible. I can't do it. I am old, and if—'

Edith laid a hand on his lips.

'Father,' she said; 'why make me unhappy? It is not necessary.'

Steinegge did not know whether to be glad or sorry. He gesticulated, made a thousand grimaces, and uttered Teutonic exclamations, like champagne corks flying out, one after the other. Before he left the room, he again begged Edith to consider the matter—to reflect, to postpone her decision. At last he went away, but a few minutes later knocked at the door to say that there was still time to send a different answer, and that she might ask Count Cæsar for his advice. But Edith cut his argument short.

'At least,' said he, obeying his ceremonious instincts; 'at least I may thank him in your name. I shall say to Signor Ferrieri, my daughter is grateful to you.'

'I don't think that is necessary, father. Say that I accept his excuses.'

'Oh, very well!'

And Steinegge went back to his room at the very moment in which Countess Fosca, revelling voluptuously in the soft, fresh sheets of the house of Salvador which enveloped her aged person, was dismissing Catte for the night with the following remark:—

'She doesn't please me at all. She doesn't please me at all. She doesn't please me at all.'

The whispers in the passages died away. The shutters with the lines of light suddenly grew dark one after the other; but the old castle did not even then sleep in peace. In the west wing, the windows of the corner room, looking towards the lake, were open and shining steadily, like the yellow eyes of some huge owl.

Marina was awake She had gone out from the Count's presence tormented by a troublesome thought. The last words he had spoken had cast a deep shadow across her heart. Her torment increased—the shadow spread further and further, as those suggestive words acquired in her mind their true significance, and echoed and re-echoed through her memory, clear and irrevocable, as when a drop of ink falls unnoticed upon a piece of damp paper, and quickly spreads out and sinks in in every direction. As she walked slowly across the loggia, with the light in her hand, the pavement beneath her feet, the roof above her head, the pillars, the arches, all echoed with one sound, the outward utterance of that troublesome thought that lurked deep down in her mind: an obligation. An obligation to the man whom she hated, and whom she ought to hate. No, she would never lay herself under an obligation to him. This lying voice should never creep in and disturb her in her love and in her hate. Never! She passed along the passage, and her uncle's words began to fill her heart with horrible remorse; and facing her, upon the opposite staircase, she saw his tall, thin figure; the large, stern features lit up with a benevolent smile.

Not till she was inside her own room, inside the walls that guarded her secret thoughts, her secret life, her favourite books, her letters and keepsakes, not till then did she feel strong in her resolve, not till then did the dull anger smouldering in her heart find shape and method.

A handful of gold in her face; that is what the Count's words meant; that was the obligation to be conferred. Gratitude for that? She felt as though she were rising haughtily from the ground, scattering from her the polluting gold, scattering it over Nepo Salvador. She despised them both, the one and the other; the gold more than the man. Never had she felt as she did now how its touch defiles. She had lived long in splendour without observing that; without caring to reflect that the light around her was the light from a rapid stream of gold, poured out from thousands of soiled and vulgar hands, carried away by thousands of others; and not the light of her own nobility, of her own beauty, of her own elegant mind. True, there had been a momentary eclipse after her father's death, but more in the appearance of the persons than of the things surrounding her. She knew that in this world money is a god; it is a luxury to despise a god. It was a luxury to her to annoy, with the cold reserve of a great lady, the wealthy *bourgeoisie*, whose women take the aristocratic polish well, the men badly. She imagined that in the eyes and on the brows of those people she could see the glitter of gold, that their voices had a metallic sound; that the rustling silk of each merchant's wife called out the figures of her bank account.

To flood her with a stream of gold was not to benefit her; other people might be benefited in that way. It was, on the contrary, to strike her, for Count Cæsar's money must be poisoned by hatred. Worse still; did he intend in that way to settle up the account of arrogance and slights, direct and indirect? Of course, that was what he intended. How on earth had she not thought of that at first?

She rang the bell for Fanny. Fanny, that evening, kept smiling softly to herself, opening her mouth every

now and then as though she wished to speak, but was waiting for an invitation before doing so.

'I hope,' said she, at last, beginning to do her mistress's hair, 'that if your ladyship had to go away from here you would not leave me behind?'

'Be quick,' replied Marina.

'I am doing it as quick as I can. How I do like that dear Countess! What a nice lady she is!'

And she went on combing.

'Is it true that there are no carriages at Venice? Anyhow, it is a better place than this, say I. Is it not?'

Marina did not answer.

'The Countess was so happy this evening. Her ladyship almost kissed me. Poor, dear lady, she really likes me. She told me I am a perfect treasure. It is hardly my place to repeat it, but she really said so. So did Madame Catte, good Madame Catte. There are not many maids like me in her part of the world, she says. She is a good servant, though. You should see how well she sews. Almost as well as I do. She said to me just now—'

'Be quick.'

'I am as quick as I can. She said just now that the Count nearly bit her head off because—'

'Have you finished?'

'Yes, my lady.'

'Well, then, you can go to bed.'

'But don't you want me to undress you?'

'No, I don't want anything. Go to bed.'

Fanny hesitated for a moment.

'Are you angry with me?'

'Yes,' said Marina, to get rid of her. 'Yes, I am angry. Go to bed.'

And she stood up, shaking her long, auburn hair in a shower over her shoulders on to her white dressing-jacket.

'Why is your ladyship angry?' said Fanny.

'About nothing, about nothing; go to bed.'

'May I say a word,' resumed Fanny, turning very red. 'If some of the big liars in this house have been telling tales to your ladyship, do not believe them, for I have known many a young and handsome gentleman, and not one of them has ever even laid a hand on me.'

'That is quite enough,' interrupted Marina. 'I don't know what you are trying to say, and I don't want to know. I am not angry. I am sleepy. Go to bed.'

Fanny went away.

'Oh, you nice man,' murmured Marina to herself, when she was alone. 'This is excellent.'

She re-read Signora de Bella's letter.

It did not strike her in the same way as at first. Gulia had discovered Corrado Silla, had written to him at once, and the letter had reached him shortly after she had promised to marry Nepo. And what followed? Were the circumstances so extraordinary as to justify her in seeing in them what she thought she saw at first—a decree of fate? She knew now that Silla was at Milan, and she knew his address.

Wonderful! She would have learnt the same facts a few days later from Edith. But was there even a shadow of an indication that Silla would return, sooner or later, to the castle? There was none. Very well, then, what result could be hoped for from sitting with folded hands waiting on a doubtful destiny?

Her thoughts rested upon this question and then suddenly became blank, leaving her with the impression of a great void, and all her senses on the stretch in

the instinctive expectation of some sign, of some voice of nature in reply. She heard the dull sound of a door being closed in the distance; then nothing more. Not a leaf was stirring to break the deep silence of the night. The dark walls, the furniture scattered about in the half-gloom of the chamber, encased in a heavy immobility, spoke to her no more. The faint reflections from the light, which shone out of the deep darkness of the shining wood like the eyes of watching spirits, now looked at her without any expression whatsoever. Suddenly her thoughts awoke to activity, and at once her heart sank within her.

She saw herself stepping into a big travelling coach with Nepo Salvador, heard the crack of the whip which dispersed all her foolish illusions, felt the carriage jerk forward and Nepo's greedy arms close about her. At that point her spirit rose again, contemptuous and calm; it was not possible; into Nepo's arm she would never fall, wife or no wife. But this thought brought another one in its train.

She had put away the letter in the escritoire and had just laid down her dressing-jacket on the low arm-chair in front of the looking-glass. She sat down there and instinctively glanced at herself in the glass, which was lighted up by two candles, one on each side, in gilt sockets. She looked at herself in that pure transparency beneath the candle-light, which flooded her hair, her shoulders, her bosom, and which appeared to reveal a statue of voluptuous beauty immersed in deep, clear water. Beneath her gleaming hair the face, veiled in light shadow, was pressed forwards; the chin supported by a delicate white hand, whiter than the rounded arm which cast a faint outline on the golden whiteness of her bosom, on the fine network of lace that edged the bare

flesh. Her shoulders bore no resemblance to the ample shoulders of the lady by Palma. Not that they were poor; indeed, in their graceful shape, in their gently sloping contour, there was an expression of pride and intelligence such as flashed from the large blue eyes and vivacious face. And never, never had lover's lips met hers! Marina, trembling all over, began to imagine that embrace. She pictured to herself that one whose face she had last seen in the light of the lightning flashes had come, from a long way off, through the dark, warm night, intoxicated with hope, led on by the amorous voices of the forest; that he was drawing nearer, drawing ever nearer, without a pause; that he passed, silent as a ghost, through the yielding gates of the castle, that he ascended the stairs, groping his way in the darkness, that he pushed open the door. . .

She rose to her feet, suffocated by a stifling sensation, and took a deep breath, searching for relief; but the soft, perfumed air was like fire. Ah, she loved him, she loved him, she called to him, she held him in her arms! Furiously she blew out the candles on the looking-glass, fell sideways on to the chair, and, taking hold of the back, placed her face against it, and bit it. She lay there for over a quarter of an hour, motionless, but for her shoulders, which heaved quickly, violently. At length she sat upright again, lost in gloomy meditation. Why had she not detained Silla when he uttered the dreaded name? Why, at the very outset, had she lost motion, and sense and will? Why had not she flung herself after him that same night, at hazard, perhaps, yet with the instinct of passion, after the man whom she had loved—how could she doubt it? at first sight; in spite of herself, in rage and disdain, after the man who had pressed her in his arms, whispering her name—

Cecilia? Did not this fulfil the prophecy of the old manuscript, that she would be loved under that name? Why not leave the castle and go in search of him at once? Why this comedy with Nepo Salvador? There was a good reason, and Marina could not forget it for long at a time.

Those concluding words of the manuscript: 'leave things in God's hands. Be they sons, be they nephews, be they cousins, the *vendetta* will be good for all. Here you must wait for it, here.' And did not all the circumstances give a confused, distant indication of how she could attain to both revenge and love?

Her confidence returned. She rose, took up the candlestick and went to the threshold of the next room and peered in, in the direction of the chest which held the secret, holding the light in her left hand above her head. Yes, it was there, hardly visible in the gloom, a black chest inlaid with white, like a coffin carved with hieroglyphics. Marina looked at it, a golden light falling on her hair and bare shoulders from the vivid tremulous splendour which shone around her upon a small portion of walls and floor; at her feet lay the round, quivering shadow of the candlestick. One of her mysterious reminiscences came upon her, and made her blood run chill. She felt that she had stood upon that threshold once before, years and years ago, at night, half-dressed, with her hair down; that she had seen at her feet the quivering shadow of the candlestick, the light playing around her over a small portion of walls and floor, and there, in front of her, the black chest, the mysterious hieroglyphics.

PART III

A DREAM OF SPRINGTIME

CHAPTER I

IN APRIL

'THE dog is faithful.'

'*Der Hund treu ist.*'

'Oh, not *Treu ist.* My dear Silla, that is a great mistake. If I say *dass der Napoleon kein treuer Hund ist*, that is good sense and good grammar. The Rhine is what you want, *der Kerl!* Have you a light?'

'Yes, but let us leave politics alone!'

'Oh,' replied Steinegge, stretching out neck and chin till his cigar met the lighted match which Silla was holding out to him. 'Oh, oh!' and he took four or five hasty puffs, 'I was not speaking for you Italians. *Der Hund ist treu.*'

Silla took up a pen and wrote accordingly. They were seated opposite to one another at a solid square oak table, without a cloth, and unvarnished. Steinegge had in front of him an old, torn, shabby grammar, splashed with ink and covered with grotesque drawings. Silla had pen and writing-paper.

'What do you think of that grammar?' said the latter as he wrote.

Steinegge turned over the book with a mischievous smile.

'Might I inquire,' he said, 'what it cost?'

'Forty-five centesimi.'

'Ah, forty-five centisimi is five cigars. That's a good deal. They would last me ten days. The ox is ill.'

'*Der Ochs ist krank.* Ten days?'

'Quite right. Go on. Ten days. I don't smoke, I only take a whiff occasionally to clear my head.'

Steinegge laughed cheerfully.

'My daughter believes,' he added, *sotto voce*, 'that I smoke two cigars a day. Why, it would be madness. I am saving money. In five months twenty francs! that's something. Eh? Not bad. Have you written that? The ass—the ass—the ass. Where is that ass? Ah! the ass is thin.'

'*Der Esel ist mager.*

'Write that down. That is the last sentence; a thought of great depth. Well, I wish to make a little present.' And Steinegge jerked his thumb towards the door behind him. 'You can advise me, being a fashionable young man.'

Silla smiled. All his claim to fashion centred in a handsomely-mounted pearl scarf-pin, a souvenir of his mother. He always wore dark gloves, dark ties, dark clothes. But he had a good figure, which set off even common clothes. Still, there was a shabbiness about the elbows, and a faded discoloured look about the collar not in keeping with a fashionable toilette.

'Look,' he said, pushing across the paper on which he had been writing.

'You must excuse me, for I'm as blind as Count Rechberg,' replied Steinegge, taking his spectacles out of their case. He put out his cigar and perched his glasses on the end of his nose. He read with his eyebrows raised and his mouth open, and appeared to be looking at himself in the looking-glass.

Silla took up the grammar, which he had found in a second-hand book stall near the cathedral. It had evidently belonged to some merry scholar of the time of the Austrian occupation, for he had scrawled it all over with names, dates, and caricatures, and had written across the list of conjugations,—

> 'Rise against the hideous, wearisome Germans,
> Rise, men of Lombardy!'

After a few minutes' silence the door behind Steinegge opened very gently. Silla rose to his feet. At the noise of his chair moving the door again closed.

'Very good, old fellow,' said Steinegge, laying down the writing-book. 'You write the German letters much better than I do. It is extraordinary how the pickaxe and spade have ruined my hand. You understand, in Switzerland.'

Steinegge replaced his spectacles in their case, adjusted his tie, and got up.

'My dear professor,' said Silla, 'we are now at the twelfth lesson.'

'Well?'

Silla took out a bundle of notes from his purse.

'Oh!' exclaimed Steinegge, turning on his heel, and walking hurriedly about the room, looking at the floor and gesticulating with his arms.

'*Das nehme ich nicht, das nehme ich nicht.*' I won't take it, I won't take it.'

'What do you mean? Don't you remember our agreement?'

'But, my dear fellow, it would be a shame for me to take your money. I want to go and call my daughter—'

'One moment! If you refuse this, I leave the house, and we shall never meet again.'

'Well, well, give me the confounded money then. You decline to do a favour to your poor old friend.'

'No, I cannot do it. I am proud.'

'Oh, you have a good heart, so have I. I know that you are fond of me. I will take the money. But why are you learning German?'

'In order to understand you when you speak Italian.'

Steinegge looked rather mortified.

'No, no, I was joking,' added Silla, taking him affectionately by the arm. 'It is in order to understand Goethe, and one of our—writers, an Italian; but chiefly for Goethe. I thought I had told you?'

'I know, but I was afraid there was some other reason; you know that my daughter earns a lot of money by giving lessons. The Count keeps on sending me German to translate into French, and what is more, every month he sends me a hundred francs. So you see I am quite rich.'

'Well, and how about me?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Steinegge, with a little bow. 'Of course, of course; so are you.'

Still the Steinegge establishment was not dazzlingly well-to-do. The room they were now in was a low corner room under the roof. It had two balconies with iron railings, one on the south side; one on the east, the walls were covered with a blue paper with a brown border, the ceiling had a fresco of sky and clouds. A varnished iron bedstead, with shining brass nobs and a chintz coverlet of pearl-colour picked out with red roses, stood up against the west wall, beneath a little picture containing a lock of fair hair, against a white background enclosed in an ebony frame. Between the door of this room and the one leading to Edith's bedroom a grey stone chimney-piece gracefully supported two small double-wicked

petroleum lamps, and, between them, a modest tumbler containing a simple bunch of large violets. Opposite the chimney-piece, on a thick-set, flat stand of blackish marble, bloomed a few *calicanthus*, like the delicate fantasies of a convalescent poet. Between the east balcony and Edith's room was a small whatnot with three shelves full of books, and surmounted by a tiny bust of Frederick Schiller. In the middle of the room, the white oak table seemed to be calling out for its black-and-blue cloth, the rich cloak with which it concealed the bareness of its legs.

Through both windows the vivifying light of a bright spring day was flooding the room, sending a bluish reflection from the sky over the sheets of paper scattered along the table, and making the ceiling bright with the reflected heat of the houses opposite, aglow in the setting sun. The two balconies commanded a fine sweep of sky, and a wild sea of roofs scattered along narrow gulleys, for so the main streets appeared; patches of old and new, of light and shade, interspersed with clumps of greenish trees and lines of white walls, rough stacks of chimneys, and shining skylights. Right below the balcony could be seen a dark mass of buildings, the Naviglio, and a long stretch of road in front of it dotted with human gnats, slowly dragging their long shadows behind them. Even had one not seen all this, the great height at which the room stood would have been apparent from the bright light and fresh air, and the deep, confused murmur of sounds which rose towards it in one single, continuous stream.

'Would you be so kind,' said Steinegge, collecting the writing materials and placing them on the whatnot, as to help me to lay the cloth. 'My daughter is very fond of this one.'

They spread out the black-and-blue cloth over the table, so that it no longer cried out for a covering.

The little room assumed an air of peace and quiet, which was reflected on our old friend's face.

'Thanks,' said he, 'many thanks. You don't know how much pleasure it gives me to do these little things. You don't know what I feel when I touch these chairs. For seventeen years I had not a chair of my own. Do you understand? Seventeen years. This wood is so pleasant to the touch. I am thankful to God, my dear friend. You are young and do not think about Him. Listen to me.' Steinegge caught hold of Silla by the arm and drew him nearer. His eyes flashed beneath the shaggy eyebrows: a ruddy hue suffused his face.

'I thank Him,' he repeated in a choking voice, and then he stood silently pointing his right forefinger, first towards the lock of fair hair in the frame, then towards Edith's room. Finally he raised it towards heaven.

'And in the past,' he continued, 'I believed that God was up there, above the clouds, like some earthly king of Prussia.'

Here Steinegge violently shook his hand, which was still clenched, with the forefinger pointing.

'No, no, believe me,' he added.

'I always have believed, my dear Steinegge,' replied Silla. 'It would have gone hardly with me if I had not done so.'

'If you only knew how happy I am,' said Steinegge. 'Sometimes I feel afraid, because I am too happy for my deserts. But then I console myself with the thought that all the merit is my daughter's. Ah! my daughter, my dear fellow!'

Steinegge joined both hands together.

'I cannot talk about her,' he went on; 'it overcomes me.'

'I can quite believe it,' said Silla, pressing his hand warmly. 'I know her.'

'No, no, you know nothing. You ought to hear her talk of the things which the priests talk about. Their preaching sounds like a wheezy barrel-organ, and Edith's words like the music one hears in dreams when one is young. We go to church together sometimes, but we never mention the priests. She understands art, too. I am a mere baby just beginning; I knew nothing about it. We went yesterday to—what is the place called? —to Brera. Imagine yourself with some great German work in your hand. You would understand about a dozen words on each page. It would rouse you, it would make your heart beat quicker to see the dozen lights gleaming through the darkness, and you would begin to wonder what Goethe meant to say on that page. This is how it affected me when I listened to my daughter, and began to understand a little about pictures. As to literature, my dear fellow—Klopstock! Novalis! Schiller! But she will never talk to you about them. What a girl she is.'

Here the eyes of Captain Steinegge filled with tears; his voice sank to a low, emphatic tone.

'A servant comes in for a few hours each day. Everything else Edith does herself, as simply and cheerfully as one goes for a walk. I am a self-indulgent old man and take my coffee in bed. I am a gourmand, but not for the coffee, but for the sake of seeing my daughter come into the room, and to hear her say, "Good morning, father," in German. Each morning it is as though I had found her again after twelve years. She brings me my coffee, brushes my clothes, and sometimes mends them. We talk about Germany, of the distant past, and of the future. Edith gives three lessons nearly every day. There are two

ladies—Signora Pedulli Ripa and Signora Serpi—two ladies, ah!' (and Steinegge opened his eyes wide and waved his arms excitedly) 'who are quite in love with her, and so are their daughters; they have often offered to send her home in their carriage, but she has always declined, because she knows that I would not get in with her.'

'You get in? What has it to do with you?'

'I wait for her in the street.'

'And why wouldn't you get into the carriage?'

'That would hardly do under the circumstances, and so my daughter always walks with me, wet or fine. I feel proud and happy then as I think that, once outside those ladies' doors, my daughter is no longer the governess. They have asked her to dinner, and wanted to take her to the theatre. But she never went. She preferred to stay at home and keep me company.'

Even his hair seemed to glisten as he said this, and his nose wrinkled with pleasure.

'How do you think we spend our evenings? Edith does some work and I make the French *précis* of Gneist for the Count. Then Edith reads some Schiller and Uhland to me, or modern poetry, which is new to me, such as Freiligrath, Geibel, and—'

'Heine?'

'No, my daughter does not read Heinrich Heine. I knew the man at Paris. He was not a good German. If you will look in some evening, I'll translate some of our poetry to you and give you a cup of tea. Edith makes tea for me every evening.'

'You take tea?' said Stilla, smiling.

Steinegge smiled uncomfortably.

'Ah, you are a spiteful fellow! I understand, I under-

stand. It is as though *der König in Thule* were to sit down and drink temperance drinks.'

'Eh? Well, I take two glasses of wine with my dinner now, and no more.'

'Is this by your daughter's wish?'

'No, by mine. My daughter begged me to take wine in the evening, and does so still, but once I saw in her eyes what her real wish was, and I take tea, my dear friend.'

'I envy you,' said Silla, taking up his hat to go.

Steinegge detained him.

'Wait, come for a walk with us.'

Silla hesitated.

'Yes, come along,' said Steinegge, and went to knock at Edith's door, asking her to come out for a moment.

Edith soon appeared, and shook hands with Silla.

'Good-day,' she said. 'What a very long lesson.'

She looked very well in her simple black dress, with a short, well-fitting skirt, and a bunch of violets at the waist. She wore her brooch of onyx mounted in gold, and a little white cape which threw a clear transparent light over her face and neck. Her long hair was arranged simply. Her delicate face had a pretty colour, and her mouth and eyes a more resolute expression than usual. It was strange how those eyes expressed her knowledge of life and its realities, a knowledge tempered by benevolence. Strange how, when they were lighted up with mirth and laughter, as they often were, a shade of sadness passed across them; as though another spirit dwelt with hers, and infused its melancholy into her mirth.

Silla and she talked together with a certain friendly familiarity, in which a close observer would, however, have noticed much reserve; as when two people on terms of close intimacy, and at the same time divided

by mutual respect, take the greatest pains not to touch each other the closer they walk together. Silla's bearing betrayed the greater caution and self-control, almost to excess; Edith's manner was more natural and equable, and her reserve was not forced, but innate. They had known one another for six months, and had often met; not in the cold atmosphere of a reception, but in the close intimacy of a domestic circle; their bond of union was a person dear to both, although in varying degrees. Since the first day they met, Edith had often spoken to Silla about the castle and its inmates. Knowing the secret story of their relations, she had touched as lightly as possible on the subject of Marina. Silla noticed this, and Edith could hardly doubt that he guessed the cause. This suggestive silence served as a kind of link between them, being a silent understanding unknown to others, formed between two hearts out of mutual regard. Similar secrets under similar circumstances lead at first to a certain pleasant sympathy; then the growing familiarity renders the silence irksome, and the desire to break through it shows itself in indirect allusions to the forbidden subject. As when two drops of water are close together on a wire, the touch of a single hair will cause them to flow together into one, so the sound of a single word breaks through the last restriction on the friends' true feelings, and the intimacy becomes complete.

Edith and Silla did not seem to have approached this stage.

She had gone off readily enough to put on hat and coat at her father's suggestion. Steinegge, too, with much ceremony, asked permission to go and make his toilette.

Meanwhile Silla stood on the balcony above the Naviglio.

The soft light of April shone that evening in the clear sky, and the breeze whispered to the ancient city the glad tidings that spring had come, and each window and casement breathed in the soft fresh air. The fresh puffs of wind spread gently over the squares, danced up and down the streets, whistled at the street corners. High up in the air they passed in silent waves, causing the linen, hung out to dry, to belly out and flutter inside the skylights; and touching on the window-sills the flowers which revelled in the soft spring air, and innocently laughed towards Heaven from old houses of ill-fame. Silla had the sun at his back. The house in which he stood, and the others on the right and on the left, the latter a huge square block, threw shadows across the gardens at their feet, across the Naviglio, across the street, and on part of the houses facing them. Beneath the balcony on the left was a terrace, on the first floor, shaded by two large magnolias, laid out with beds of red and white flowers, and protected by a low parapet of red granite. Five or six men in tail coats and white ties, but without gloves, were walking up and down there smoking. A lady, a dazzling apparition in blue velvet with a white camelia in her hair, appeared leaning on the arm of a short, stout gentleman, also in a tail coat and white tie. The smokers crowded about her with respectful eagerness.

From Silla's balcony the conversation could not be followed, but the voices could be heard, and he readily distinguished that of the little fat man, Commendatore Vezza. Silla knew the lady, a well-preserved beauty of five-and-forty, separated for some years from a gambling husband, and noted for her literary affectations, the excellence of her cuisine, and the dubious nature of her love affairs. An odour of refined sensuousness seemed

to rise from that terrace into the pure evening air, a perfume breathing a thousand exquisite delights, like the mingled fumes of dainty dishes which rise into the street from the subterranean kitchens of some great hotel. But high up in the evening breeze this breath of mundane life was dissipated. There, one breathed in a pleasant melancholy, like the soft, vague imaginings of youthful purity, and the confused conflict of young desire. Silla lost thought of the present; his thoughts were with memories of distant lands, vague amorous longings of early youth, snatches from popular poetry. One verse in particular haunted him—

'Sweet parted lips, that laugh like opening roses.'

'Signor Silla,' said Edith, smiling, 'are you going to stop out there?'

Silla started, turned round hastily, and began to apologise for his absence of mind.

Edith and Steinegge had been waiting for him. The former had on a dark grey coat, and a black hat and veil.

'It seems a pity,' said Silla, 'to have to go down.'

'You would like to take a walk among the clouds?'

He looked up, slightly piqued, but noticed the hidden sadness of her smile, and said nothing.

'Forgive me,' she said, 'I have no poetic feeling.'

Possibly she had not, yet there was so much poetry in her voice, so much in the graceful figure lighted up by the setting sun.

'Well, shall we be going?' said Steinegge.

'It is not possible,' Silla replied at length to Edith as they left the room.

He had been thinking it out. Edith did not speak, nor could one see how she received Silla's tardy response,

for she was already on the staircase, and it was getting dark.

It was pleasant to escape from that cold, dark staircase and get out into the street, still bright with the fading sunlight, and shining, in its wind-swept cleanliness, like Steinegge's silk hat. The latter was walking beside his daughter, on her left, straight as a capital Y turned upside down.

'Oh,' said he, suddenly coming to a standstill, 'by-the-bye, Don Innocenzo wrote to me to-day.'

He began to feel in his pockets for the letter, but, at a rapid glance from Edith, said that he had left it at home, and began speaking of it in high terms.

'Very affectionate,' said Edith, 'and very—'

She could not find the word.

'Not witty—no. There is another word which, somehow, I fancy would be more appropriate.'

'Vivacious?' suggested Silla.

'Yes, vivacious.'

Edith remembered a good deal of the letter, and repeated it to Silla.

It was not the first time that Don Innocenzo had written to his old German friend. He did so in accordance with a wish secretly expressed to him by Edith before leaving the castle. His kindly, sensible letters were written in choice Italian, his style being somewhat formal, the style of an educated man who writes little. He wrote about the troubles of his parishioners—of great sufferings supported with Christian humility. He spoke with respect of the old-fashioned virtues of his villagers. He spoke of faith in religion like a man who, in his youth, has fought hard not to lose it, and, having gained the victory, regards with great indulgence those who have fought and lost. He mentioned that the snow, the frost

and the heavy rains had damaged the roof of his church; and that, on the preceding Sunday, a young organist passing through the village had played for them, in masterly style, some German music, he believed by Bach. The people did not appreciate it, but he himself was still enraptured by it. He went on to say that the building of the new paper-mill was getting on rapidly, and that many pre-historic pots and pipkins discovered in the foundations now adorned his private museum. He announced that the sunny sides of the mountains and the northern banks of the lake were in full spring foliage, and he described their aspect with studied elegance of style. The good priest concluded with a pressing invitation to the Steinegges to pass a few days at his house as soon as possible.

Edith repeated the letter almost word for word, only omitting one portion. It was curious to hear about the lakes and mountains and the simple country life on the road to Porta Venezia, between the two streams of people going to the fortifications, amid the dull rattle of the carriage wheels and the impatient pawing of the high-spirited steeds, in front of walls—white, red and yellow with bills and placards of every kind. The sun had disappeared. From the west, white clouds with golden edges threw a warm reflected light on the highest of the houses, and the evening breeze was steeped in the perfume of spring, of cigar smoke and scented handkerchiefs. The ladies who were driving along by the fortifications, seemed to be making for the brightness in the west, abandoning themselves silently, in unwonted lassitude, to the caresses of the soft evening air. The two long, black streams of people, picked out with the bright colours worn by the ladies, passed along on the right and left side of the road, with a deep, confused sound of

footsteps and voices, like two long strips of heavy drapery dragged along the pavement, away from the deep shadow of the city. All the windows were open. It seemed to Silla as though all hearts were open too, as though that stream of human beings carried with it a rich store of gay thoughts, of laughing fantasies, which reflected the eternal youth and freshness of the spring. Even in the colour of the stones, still warm with sunlight, he saw the hand of life-giving April, which, if it could not animate them, at least gave them the desire, the distant hope of life. It did not appeal to him to hear of the lake and of the mountains; the voices of the past spoke not to him.

'Does not the curate mention anything else?' he said to Edith.

'Nothing else,' Steinegge replied for her.

'What? Not a word about the castle?'

'Well, he does just mention it.'

'Doesn't he mention Donna Marina's marriage?' Steinegge was unable to reply, for just then a tilbury came thundering past them, and Silla turned to look at the horse, a fast-trotting bay.

'A fine horse,' remarked the ex-captain of cavalry, 'a fine horse, but too light. A Hungarian horse. I know them. It would be better as a saddle horse.'

'Well,' Silla repeated, 'doesn't he mention the wedding?'

Steinegge looked at him, half doubtful whether he was really so indifferent.

'I think he does say something about it.'

'Your father is acting diplomatically, Miss Edith.'

'I don't think so,' she replied. 'You would make too poor a hand at it, father, wouldn't you? But what are we to say of you, Signor Silla?'

'I am inquisitive, you mean. You are right. But it is a very innocent curiosity, believe me.'

He laid some stress on these words, as though they meant more than met the ear. Steinegge now sallied forth from his trenches; he proceeded, however, with a certain caution.

'Well, it seems,' he said, 'that affairs are advancing pretty fast, and that the wedding will not be long delayed.'

'I can quite believe that. They've been engaged for six months already.'

'Yes, but there are many long preliminaries to be gone through. Now they are being rapidly completed, very rapidly.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said Silla, quietly. Steinegge threw aside all reserve.

'The wedding,' he resumed, 'is to take place, it would seem, this evening, the twenty-ninth of April. There are to be great rejoicings, with music and fireworks. The contract of marriage is already signed. They say that the Count wished to settle on Donna Marina a dowry of three hundred and twenty thousand francs, but that she preferred a deed of gift for that amount, to be signed by the Count at the time of the marriage and given to her husband. The Count has not been well for some days, but is now better. Count Nepo has been at the castle for a week, at the beginning of the month. The servants say he is very stingy, but Don Innocenzo says that he gave a hundred francs to the poor.'

Steinegge joked about this munificent donation which had dazzled the poor old priest, but Silla took a different view, and maintained that good actions are not measured by rule of thumb, and that you do not look a gift horse in the mouth. Silla talked vivaciously and well, occa-

sionally stopping in order to greet an acquaintance or to make some amusing remark to Edith about the people and things they passed. All his friends looked curiously at Edith. She made brief replies, without looking up at him, and only when she could do no less. She had become very grave, and she passed her arm through her father's.

Silla gradually ceased to talk either. He suspected that Edith had attached a certain significance to his assumption of indifference about Marina's marriage, and that she intended to be on her guard. His heart beat loudly; a pleasant mist seemed to pass over his reflections. Somebody in the crowd greeted him; he did not reply; he walked amidst the throng of people as though he neither saw nor heard.

Soon after, they reached the fortifications. The air up there was fresher, and steeped in the fresh scent of the fields, but a great crowd of people still passed along the avenue on the left; and, above their heads, one could see, driving slowly along the central avenue, coachmen of every kind—pompous coachmen, humble coachmen, coachmen with footmen, and coachmen without, satisfied coachmen, resigned coachmen, dark, yellow, red, blue and green coachmen. Edith wished to turn back. She thought the air was damp, and was afraid her father would catch cold. Steinegge laughed at her. When had she ever seen him care about the weather? And she was so fond of the Corso! Edith did not insist.

At the top of the avenue Steinegge began waving his arms about, and firing off a volley of questions in German to a gentleman who had taken up a position, from which he was watching the procession of carriages. This was Mr C——, with whom Steinegge some time before had endeavoured to found a '*correspondence lithographique.*'

He turned round and came forward, holding out his hand.

'Excuse me,' said Steinegge to Edith and Silla, 'this is C——, I must go and speak to him. Go on; I will follow at once.'

Before Edith could say anything, her father had skipped away through the crowd, and the continuous stream of passers-by prevented her following him up. After going a little way she turned round, but could not see her father. It was awkward for her to stand there alone, looking about her, and she felt embarrassed. Silla humbly suggested that she should go on, as her father had said, otherwise he would look for her further on, and not find her. They walked along the crowded avenue amid the throng of idlers, looking at the carriages which were going at walking pace, and now and then stopping. They walked apart without speaking, looking attentively at every carriage, whether a smart landau or a shabby fly. Every now and then Edith looked back.

The wide sweep of country beyond the bastions could be seen in the half light, stretching away against the pale blue horizon which seemed to mingle with it, and bathed in the soft dews of the April night. Beyond the mundane throng, here and there, between the carriages, glimpses of a distant, quiet land appeared, disappeared, and appeared once more. Towards the east, dark houses stood out against the orange sky, which threw a faint glow over the gardens running from the houses to the road. The dark stream of people on foot moved slowly, enjoying the pleasant air, and the subdued roll of the carriages, that music of wealthy idleness, suggestive of pleasurable thoughts. The ladies in their handsome carriages passed and repassed under the green shade of the plane trees, like lazy goddesses, running the gauntlet of eager eyes,

the envious curiosity of the public; soothed by the sense of notoriety, their eyes looking straight before them, fixed on some invisible point above the crowd. This soft, gradual movement of the stream, this restlessness of weary humanity, seemed to be in keeping with the new movement, with the fresh creative powers of the earth. Silla would have spoken, would have gladly interrupted a silence full of embarrassment, full of anxious thoughts, but he could find no opportunity of doing so. They reached the *café* in the gardens just as many pleasure-seekers were coming out again into the street, breaking through the stream of passers-by. He now offered his arm to his companion, who, thanking him, just placed her hand upon it. The light touch seemed to go to Silla's heart. He made a way for Edith through the crowd, now and then stealing a glance at the little hand resting listlessly on his arm. As they emerged from the pushing, trampling crowd, he felt the hand being gradually withdrawn. He instinctively moved his arm, and hardly knowing what he was saying, except that he was embarking on a dangerous topic.

'Excuse me,' he began, 'but did Donna Marina ever speak of me?'

Edith did not expect this question. She did not withdraw her hand, and replied simply,—

'Yes.'

She carefully prepared a safe answer to the next, and, as she thought, inevitable question; but the second question did not come.

'What a nice mild evening,' said Silla. 'One feels young again, with springtime in one's heart. You would not tell me all that Don Innocenzo said; and I was so glad to hear it from your father.'

Edith's hand moved, but it still rested on his arm.

'Perhaps you know how, when one's hand is injured, one avoids every pressure, even of a friendly hand, and how pleased one feels when one day it is seized in a friendly grip and one has no more pain.'

'That means that there was a scratch, and that the person in question fears pain very much. If the injuries were mental, it would seem to me a humiliating thing to feel them no longer, to recover from them as one recovers from a fever, as these plants recover from the effects of winter. Doesn't it strike you in that way? What a crowd of people! And my father does not come?'

She gently removed her hand from Silla's arm and stood still; Steinegge could not be seen anywhere.

'Pardon me, Miss Edith,' said Silla, with a slight tremor in his voice, 'you judge me hardly. That is a thing I have been accustomed to ever since I lost my mother. The fault is to a great extent mine, the result of my temperament; still, it is hard to bear. With some pride, and some faith in the judgment of others, either here or beyond, one may go on struggling; but there are times when one loses pride, and faith, and heart. May I add one word. Men give me the cold shoulder, fortune mocks at me. Still I have held my head high up to now; but it is rather cruel to hit a man on whom everybody turns their backs. Allow me to take your arm. I would ask you to listen to me for one minute.'

'I had no idea of offending you,' said Edith, replacing her arm in his. 'I was talking of human nature generally.'

He laid his left hand firmly on that restless hand, drew it through his arm, and began to talk more frankly and openly, in the midst of that careless crowd, than he would have done had he been alone with Edith in the middle of a desert.

'Human nature? Quite so, but not quite as you put

it. I did not recover my strength as the plants do, under the influence of sun, and air, and forgetfulness. I wished to get well, and I got well by force of will; I crushed out of me a feverish desire which was dragging me downwards. For I do not respect her, and I never did.'

'No?' said Edith, with involuntary vivacity.

'No, never, I want you, whose thoughts are so noble, to believe me. I want someone like you to believe in me and be my friend. I never tell anyone, but in my solitary life, without friendship, or love, or hope, or success, I often feel as though my soul would starve in the lofty heights where I strive to keep it, reading, working, thinking of God. At such times I hear evil voices calling, ever louder, ever louder, calling to me, calling me to some degrading fall which would kill my higher life for ever. Forgive me, perhaps I annoy you with so much talk?'

'Oh! not at all,' said she, softly; 'I should not have expected to hear what you say.'

'Yes, I am usually very reserved. I am talking this evening because I seem to be in a dream.'

'You dream,' said Edith, 'that you are talking to somebody who died long ago, in whom you could trust.'

'No, I am dreaming a dream of springtime, as these old plane trees do when the people have all gone home and the moon has risen. I, too, feel as though a new life were budding within me, as though I were whispering, after a long silence, to the kindly spring, and telling her of all the sad experiences of the autumn and winter, as though it all happened years and years ago. I never respected her. I must explain one thing. In my hours of discouragement I always felt strongly that my fortunes were under the influence of some mysterious fate. Your

father could not tell you everything because he does not know everything. I make the kindly spring my *confidante*. Some time ago I published an anonymous work, entitled *A Dream*.'

'Can one get it?' asked Edith.

'You will read it some day. Shortly before I left Milan my publishers received a letter addressed to the author of *A Dream*, and signed "Cecilia." It was on scented paper, and sparkled with wit, irony, and French epigrams; it dealt largely with the subjects of fate and destiny. I did not altogether care for the tone of Cecilia's letter, but there was a certain strange fascination about it; and also, though you may smile, it flattered my *amour propre*. I have tasted but little of the delights of public fame, and I found a greater charm in this secret letter from an anonymous correspondent. You see, I tell you all my troubles. Well, I sent a reply. Cecilia's letter reached me on the eve of my departure for the castle. It was full of pointed remarks, and inquisitive demands. I decided to close the correspondence; I wrote her a letter which I began at the castle, and left here when I came for my books. Your father has told you how I came to leave the castle. That very day I discovered—what do you think?—that Cecilia was Donna Marina herself. As I was leaving at midnight I came across her in her boat. We had a violent scene. A thunderstorm came on, and I had to see her home. Without going into details, I was keenly tempted to remain at the castle. I tore myself away from her, whispering in her ear the name 'Cecilia,' and departed full of fear, full of the infatuated idea which pursues me, of being the sport of a hostile power which, from time to time, shows me happiness, offers it to me, and snatches it away as I am on the point of seizing it. It required

all my pride before I could trample under foot those cowardly fears; I rid myself of unworthy thoughts by working like a madman, burying myself in ancient literature, as in a cold-water douche, and writing of my own ideals till my brain quieted down and recovered a healthy tone. In the end I won. How complete was the victory I did not realise this till evening.'

'Oh,' said Edith, stopping, 'where are we?'

They were alone, having passed, without noticing it, the end of the fashionable promenade.

Edith blushed at her absence of mind and turned round hastily, letting go of Silla's arm, fearing that she might have offended him.

'I could not know all this,' she remarked, 'and I have not quite understood all that you have told me. If you only knew what my father thinks of you. I am not an Italian,' she added with energy, 'and I don't know whether your career has been a failure; but it is certainly not the case,' and her voice sank, 'that you have no friends.'

Whether from the tender influence of springtime, or because moved by his recent confidences, her simple words caused a mist to rise before Silla's eyes. Again he drew her arm through his. 'Ah!' he said, 'is it true that you believe me, even though you may not quite understand me, and that you have confidence in me? I would give fame, renown, a hundred, a thousand times over if they were mine to give, not for a friendship, that is not enough—'

Edith's arm trembled in his.

He went on with a quivering voice unlike his own, and swerving in his walk as though his legs shook under him.

'For a kindred spirit. For one which would accept

from me, and desire for herself alone, the creations of my imagination; a spirit closed to the world, as mine would be to all but hers. A spirit vivifying and pure, as the pure sky above us. Together we should love, through our mutual love, God and his creation with more than earthly love. We should be strong in our union, stronger than the ordinary herd imagine possible, stronger than time and misfortune and death; we should understand the hidden mystery of things; and across our minds would flash visions of our future life, visions of superhuman splendour. Shall I find such a spirit?'

'It would be an egotistical one if it desired for itself alone the work of your brain. Fame, I believe, must ever leave something unsatisfied, something of sadness, in a mind such as yours; but to have the power to move to love and tears, to influence minds for good, and not to use it? To have burning thoughts and to keep them hidden, instead of sending them flashing across this great turbid stream of earthly life!'

'Such a part is not for me. The little that I have written has gone down into silence, it is in keeping with my unhappy fate. Perhaps some day a curious investigator of forgotten literature—'

At this moment Steinegge appeared, red and out of breath.

'At last!' he said. 'I thought that you had climbed up into a tree. I have been hunting up and down after you like a spaniel.'

'Forgive us, father,' said Edith, gently, leaving Silla's arm and taking her father's, although he, in his ceremonious way, protested. 'We got away for a few minutes from the crowd.'

She spoke soothingly to him in German, pressing his arm as though she wished to compensate him for her

temporary absence. Poor Steinegge, perfectly happy, made excuses for not joining them sooner, as though the fault were his. Silla said nothing. They walked on together. The fashionable crowd was dispersing. The broad streets, the gardens, the distant view were becoming veiled in mist. The ladies, as they walked languidly along, were emboldened by the darkness to cast keener glances at the passers-by. One could hear conversations in the distance, and beyond the gardens and along the dark line of houses the lamps showed up one after the other, bright eyes of a city preparing for a night of pleasure. Above the houses a clear, starless sky was still tinged with a warm pearl-coloured hue, which spread over the edge of the bastion and the white terrace of the 'Garden Café;' towards which Steinegge was making his way with large and hospitable ideas. Opposite the porch stood an elegant landau. A footman was opening the carriage door for two ladies, who were leaving the restaurant. Silla raised his hat. One of them, as she passed, remarked in very friendly tones,—

'Don't forget. After "The King."'

'I congratulate you heartily, my dear fellow,' said Steinegge.

'What about?' replied Silla, contemptuously. 'It is the Signora de Bella, a silly Parisian doll. I never go to her house. This is how I came to know her. Last autumn a man I know, named G——, who is studying languages at Berlin, sent me some verses by a poet of ours, Bonvesin de Riva, which had been published there. By the same post he sent books and photographs to this lady, who was at Varese. The postman, by mistake, took my little book to her house at Milan with hers. She happened to return from Varese that day, and in Via San Guiseppe came across me and my aunt, Signora

Pernetti. My aunt stopped to talk to her, and presently introduced me. The lady looked surprised. "Oh," she said, "why, I have some of your property." Not understanding, I said nothing. "You are the author of *A Dream?*" she added. I was stupefied. Then, smiling, she explained about the little book of verses, and added, frankly enough, that she had noticed a slip of paper on which my friend had written, "Send me a copy of your *Dream*." She gave me a pressing invitation to go and call, and I did go there once or twice in December. Then I left off calling. This morning I got a note from her saying that she wishes to see me, and asking me to go there to-morrow evening after the theatre.'

Silla gave this narrative with some energy, as though anxious to explain away the acquaintance. They sat down outside the *café*. The lamps were not yet lighted, and the tables were almost deserted. From inside, where the gas was flaring, came the loud voices of the waiters, the clattering of cups and saucers, the ringing of spoons and money thrown down on tea-trays. Steinegge began to talk about his friend C——, whom he had known in the East. They first met in 1857 at Bucharest, the next year at Constantinople, then in 1860 at Turin. Steinegge was fond of speaking of his sojourn in the realms of the Sublime Porte. He passed on from C—— to Stamboul and the Bosphorus. It excites the softer emotions to sit in the twilight listening to tales of distant countries, of strange tongues and strange customs. Silla often glanced at Edith, listening to the speaker as one listens, when one is reading, to some pleasant music, which gives a touch of poetry to one's thoughts, though not a single note is remembered afterwards. It was around the graceful form of Edith in the half light that he wove a veil of poetry, as he listened to tales of

cypresses and Moorish fountains and marble palaces and sunlit seas. Every line of her elegant figure seemed to him imbued with new graces, veiled in an impenetrable charm. He could not see her eyes, he pictured them; he seemed to feel their soft glance in his heart. He imagined what her thoughts were, or rather their dignity, and purity, and peace. His own being seemed illuminated with a peaceful light, a warmth far removed alike from indifference and from passion, a new and indefinable faith in the future. He felt as though he were rising upwards; and at the same time his visual powers were enormously increased, and the deep shadows thrown by the trees upon the bastion, the sharp outlines of the objects near him, all stood out with extraordinary clearness; and with the charm of novelty which one experiences in childhood.

Meantime Steinegge talked on steadily. He was telling a funny anecdote of his crossing from Constantinople to Messina. At that moment the gas in the lamp next to them, touched by the lamplighter, flared up noisily, full in Edith's face.

She was grave and very pale, and was not looking at her father. She gave a start, and began to listen to him with too sudden an air of close attention to be quite sincere. Silla noticed this, and it sent a sudden thrill of pleasure through him.

When, later on, he accompanied father and daughter on their return journey, very few words were exchanged between them. As he said good-night, Silla held out his hand to Edith, who gave him hers with hesitation, and quickly withdrew it. He hardly noticed the hearty farewells of Steinegge, and went away sad at heart, yet longing to be alone. He walked away with slow steps and bowed head, calling up vividly Edith's pale face and

absent eyes when the light flared up over her unawares. He thought of all they had said, his confidences, her protestation of friendship, so unusual for one so cautious, her embarrassment at being separated from her father, forgotten, however, when she took Silla's arm and he spoke to her. He came to no decided conclusion, but he looked down at the arm where hers had rested as though it were a spot of hallowed memories.

CHAPTER II

QUID ME PERSEQUERIS?

He slept but little that night. The deep, solemn sound of the clock of Sant Ambrogio striking the hours filled his room, mingling with his uneasy dreams, and flooding his brain with the anxieties of the morrow. Towards daybreak he fell into a deep sleep, from which he did not wake till the day was far advanced. It was a dull grey morning, and it was raining.

Silla felt worn out, as though he had travelled twenty miles on foot during the night to walk off a feverish feeling, which, however, his growing weariness had only increased. He was seized with the idea of going for a walk on the fortifications, but did not do so. For some minutes he remained sitting on his bed, looking out on the dull, cold sky—as forbidding now as in 'February fill-dyke'—on the wet, shining roofs, and, against the dark windows opposite, the waving lines of rain which ran whispering along the tiles like the rustling of light draperies, and then rushed noisily down the water-pipes into the courtyard below.

He kept looking out without thinking, or at least thinking without the control of his will, confusedly. It was the shadow of a dream of which the ideas kept moving at haphazard, like guests wandering stupefied through noble reception-rooms in which no host appears

to greet them. Yet in his heart he felt something which had not been there the evening before, a mixture of weariness and excitement, a dull pain which made itself felt whenever the eyes, now intent on the falling rain, saw, in imagination, the glance of Edith's eyes. There was a melancholy doubt which he could ill endure. The grey clouds knew what it was, the rain kept repeating it over and over again,—

'Weep, weep, she loves you not, she loves you not!'

He laboriously struggled against the foolish suspicion that Edith had changed since the preceding evening, as the sky had done; that a night's rest, followed by other thoughts, had extinguished her growing inclination, if indeed such inclination existed outside his own heated imagination. He would go this very day and take her *A Dream* as he had promised. How would she receive it?

He had at his rooms nearly the whole edition of his novel, a great heap of volumes, dusty outside, white and intact inside, like so many virtuous little old nuns. He took up one, and began to think what dedication he should write. He prepared about a dozen. Some seemed frigid, some too high-flown. At last he wrote across the flyleaf:—

'To the kindly Spring.—C. S.'

A minute later he felt dissatisfied. He thought that the ought to say more and make her understand what he really felt. But on the book itself? No, that was hardly the correct thing. Why? Not finding a 'why' of sufficient efficacy he wrote underneath the dedication, 'The kindly Spring is loved by an obscure author for whom nobody cares. Through her, and through her alone, can he become strong and great, and overcome misfortune and oblivion. If he is rejected by her, he will let himself sink to rise no more.'

As soon as he had written this, he took up some work to soothe the agitation which was wearing him out. He had recourse to an old manuscript, his faithful companion, which grew slowly with other work, fed partly by abstract reasoning, partly by daily experience of mankind and of life.

When, taking the longest way round, he arrived at the well-known door, he did not enter or even stop. He felt that his fate was awaiting him inside. He passed on for about a hundred paces, and then hastily turned back, feeling ashamed of himself, and comparing himself to a foolish boy who longs for his lady-love from afar, and is afraid of her when near. He looked at the doorkeeper, without speaking. She knew him, and, raising her head from her needlework, said, 'At home.'

Silla slowly went up the stairs, nervously grasping hold of the bannister. When he had rung the bell, his nerves grew calmer, and he wondered to himself how he had allowed his imagination to agitate him so greatly.

'Ah, my dear friend! This is a great piece of luck in this German weather. Give me your hat,' cried Steinegge, who had opened the door, and who now relieved him, by main force, of hat and umbrella.

'Good afternoon, Signor Silla,' said Edith, quietly.

She was sitting near the window, working. She had raised her face, which was neither flushed nor pale, for

friend, a visitor who is honest, civil, not clever perhaps, but good-hearted, and who only asks for an interview when convenient to you.'

'How was that? It must have been jealousy.'

'No, no, no. There are some unlucky people and some unlucky books which excite the antipathy even of gentle natures.'

'That is true, old fellow, one sees that every day.'

'But I don't think that an author ought to believe it,' observed Edith, without raising her head from her work.

Silla said nothing.

'Why, Edith?' said Steinegge.

'Because such an idea must rob him of his self-confidence and his power, and must prevent him from studying the weak points in his work.'

'No,' said Silla, 'for a time one stands firm; nay, the more ill-fortune assails one, the more contemptuous one feels, the harder one works, the more we strive to satisfy our sense of duty. The wounds we receive seem only to stimulate us, to give us fresh vigour; but one day comes an unexpected one in the side, and then nothing remains but to fall with one's face to the foe, without asking for quarter.'

'That may be so, but I should say that we ought to mistrust our imagination, and not attribute to fortune qualities which don't belong to it. Don't you think that it is more manly to trust little to fortune?'

'Oh,' exclaimed Steinegge, 'how can you help believing in fortune? Would you be in exile, poor and almost alone, with an old, broken-down man, if it were not for fortune?'

Edith's eyes flashed.

'Father!' she said.

He had not the courage to affirm in words what

he had already said, but he did so by nodding his head, chuckling to himself.

Edith rose and went up to him. 'Excuse me, Signor Silla,' she said passionately; 'you are a friend of ours and will allow me to say a word to my father. You must know quite well,' she added, turning to the latter, 'that there is no greater happiness for me than to live with you, by ourselves, to love you and serve you, and to feel that I am protected by you and that you love me?' She said this in Italian, and then continued her affectionate appeal in German. Meanwhile, her father kept interrupting her with exclamations and much gesticulation, striking the volumes of Gneist and the table with his hands, while every muscle of his wrinkled face quivered with emotion. He was on the point of breaking down. To pull out his watch and exclaim, 'Oh, C—— is waiting for me,' to snatch up his hat, wave an elaborate farewell to Silla, and slip out of the room was the work of a moment. Edith called out after him, but he did not answer; she ran out to detain him, but he was already at the foot of the stairs, having forgotten his umbrella. She stood hesitating for a moment, pale as death; but quickly recovered herself, and instead of returning to her seat at the window, bent over the lamps and flowers on the mantelpiece and re-arranged them.

'Signora Edith,' began Silla, with a quivering voice.

She turned round, and holding out her hand, said,—

'Good-bye.'

Silla was silent for a moment, then he continued,—

'Excuse me if I take up another minute of your time. I wanted to tell you that now, for the first time, after so much uncertainty and so many rebuffs, I begin to believe in fortune.'

Edith made no reply.

'Do you understand me, Signora Edith?'

'Signor Silla, you are a friend of my father's, and therefore of mine. I do not understand why you speak to me in this fashion. I do not know your language very well, but if you wish your words to convey more than they ought to do, I do not, and will not, approve of it.'

She uttered the words 'will not' with energy, haughtily, in agitation. It seemed as though she were imposing her will not on Silla only.

Silla bowed.

'I have no wish,' he replied, 'to make my words convey more than they ought to do, and there is not one which I need regret. For the rest, I came to-day to tell your father that I cannot come for my lesson to-morrow. Would you be so very kind as to give him that message?'

'Certainly.'

'A thousand thanks. Good-day, Signorina.'

He walked up to the bookshelf and took up his poor little book.

'Why?' asked Edith.

He smiled and shook his head, as though to say,—'What does it matter to you?'

'My father saw it,' she said, rather timidly, but without emotion. Silla laid down the book on the table, and with a profound bow, which she barely acknowledged, left the room.

Edith, on being left alone, returned to her seat by the window and picked up the handkerchief which she was hemming for her father. The needle had fallen to the ground and the thread had come out. She began to thread her needle again. Her hands trembled and she had to give up the attempt. She bent over her work, and two big tears fell upon the cambric. She rose, laid down the handkerchief, and took up *A Dream*, and

standing near the table, glanced at the dedication, and then turned over a few pages without reading them. Turning over the pages one by one she came back to the dedication, and her eyes rested on it. How long they rested there!

At last she brusquely closed the book and placed it on the mantelpiece, behind the bust of Schiller. She thought better of it, and laid it beside the bust, where her father had put it first. Then she opened the window and went out, leaning over the railing of the balcony.

It was still raining and blowing. The green clumps of trees between the houses sadly shook their heads. A thick white veil of cloud shut in the whole horizon; at its lower edge could be seen the dark line of fields. The view was a wild and gloomy one, but Edith paid no heed to it. She had come out in search of air, of free fresh, life-giving air, and she enjoyed the cold, fine raindrops which fell in quick succession. After a long time she went in and composed the following letter to Don Innocenzo.

'MILAN, *30th April* 1865.

'REVEREND AND DEAR FRIEND,—We accept your very kind invitation to pass a few days at your house, and we are very much obliged to you for thinking of us. The Count can hardly feel offended if we do not call at the castle; for he must be in need of rest after all the trouble and confusion of a big house-party for the wedding. My father and I are also in need of quiet and green meadows. Excuse the bad Italian; I express myself clumsily. I mean that we have need of the silence and repose which one finds among green fields, and which lay to rest morbid thoughts and give birth to others, fresh and simple and as eager for pure air as the leaves and grass.

'For some time past my father has not made such pro-

gress as I had hoped, and I am uneasy, and fear it is my fault. I fear I did not choose the best line, and did not turn to good account my father's great affection for me. Perhaps I should have done better to have boldly broken the ice at once, to have appealed to him, to have prayed, to have demanded. Possibly I should not then have lost part of my influence over him as I now fear to have done through my cautious, perhaps worldly-wise, methods, and my attempt to appear perfectly happy and contented without a single anxious thought.

'I thought well, reverend and dear sir, to seek counsel of a good old priest to whom I went at Easter. He advised me to offer special prayers to the Virgin and to many of the saints. I humbly believe that this advice is good; yet, I have need of knowing how to manage my father, how I ought to speak at all times, and it may be of no small consequence if I make mistakes. I feel that I cannot hope for help from above if I do not also use, to the best of my ability, my own intelligence.

'God has been very merciful to me, in that my father now attends church regularly, and I know also that he prays in private; but these results were obtained early, at the beginning. He listens readily to conversations on religious subjects, which I sometimes try to lead up to, and he then seems well inclined to the true faith; but if the question turns on those technical details in which the priest necessarily has a voice, I see at once how much it costs him to conceal his violent antipathy. Perhaps in the early days he could have overcome this feeling, perhaps he would do so now, if I begged him to make the endeavour; but ought I to do so? Ought I to torture myself? Can this be a filial duty? Would it bear good fruit, acceptable to God? When I think of the great wrongs inflicted on my father, and the long years he has

passed amid godless men; when I think of his invincible integrity, and his tender love for my mother, *even now*, and for me; when I think of his returning belief in God, I begin to revere my father as a saint, although he may not practise all the observances kept by me and other small-minded people like me; and it seems an ill thing to try to force him to do things for which his heart, as yet, has no desire. These are my secret doubts and fears.

'I have need, reverend sir, of your oral teaching, which is ever clear and sound. Above all, I wish my father to pass some little time with you. He is sincerely attached to you; a feeling which one cannot possibly reconcile with his other known opinions. To me it is like a silent signpost at the commencement of a road.

'I should be wanting in frankness if I did not tell you that I require your assistance for myself also.

'You know how I regard my duty to my father. I am convinced that my view of it is the correct one. I must give myself up entirely to my father, who has nobody else in the world. For years he has wandered about alone, enduring injustice and toil and hunger, while I was living as a rich young lady at Nassau, never sending him even a message. All the affection I can give him is but a poor compensation for all this. I do not well express what I feel. I shall do so better when I can talk to you in your quiet house amid the peaceful fields.

'I shall tell you how my weak woman's heart was nearly taken by surprise, unprepared, but with some effort my spirit rose, and now I feel a mixture of pain and fear and soft regret, and joy at suffering a little for my poor old father's sake. It is a very worldly confession which I shall have to make to you; one made to obtain a welcome sense of abasement and relief; those shadows of the life beyond, which we gain at the confessional.

Besides, I would wish to free myself from the burden of my secret. Pardon this long letter. In writing to you I always seem to obtain increased faith and hope. What I see of religion in Italy is not always in accordance with my own feelings; perhaps because I have the cold, German temperament. If in this there is any taint of pride, you must tell me; it is one of my weak points. But in all that you say I hear the ring of sterling gold, and all my heart goes out to you in response.

'Pray God for us and keep us in your thoughts.

'E. S.'

Silla went down the stairs with a feeling of quiet bitterness, full of irony towards himself, as though it gave him pleasure to tread under foot, on each step, one of the stupid illusions, the wild imaginings which he had carried up those stairs but a few minutes before; to tread them under foot sternly, raising his head and steeling his heart against the invisible foe. In this courtyard also the ceaseless rain kept repeating 'weep, weep,' but he was not inclined to weep. For the third time his hopes had been blighted. The hope of a love which would quiet the tortured cry of his soul and make him feel strong and pure, secure for ever. Never again, waking and sleeping, to see before him the sinister phantom of a last, final fall into the darkness, never to rise again. For the third time God said to him, 'You see how beautiful it is? It is not for you.' Was he to cry like a child, like a coward? Never! His pride and his gloomy presentiments forbade him even to think of that which another man would have proposed; to make a struggle for it, to win Edith by a long siege. That Edith was dissimulating he never for an instant suspected. To be loved? He? Impossible! he knew that already.

In the street, a few paces from the Steinegges' door, he met a second-rate publisher, to whom he had been given an introduction a few days before. The latter looked the other way and passed on without bowing. What did this matter to Silla now? He shrugged his shoulders. He could very well put up with even this, could afford to despise this gentleman who allowed himself to be rude to authors whose works he did not care to publish. He would go on struggling as long as there was blood in heart and brain. And there was plenty still, rich in vigorous thoughts, in pathos, and in just resentment. He felt that he had many things to say in the service of truth, many fine stirring pages, before descending, in the evening of his days, into the tomb, unknown and contemptuous; with the proud consciousness that he had walked justly beneath an unjust God.

An arrogant and haughty thought, which, as it issued from the solitary recesses of his mind, filled him with amazement, with a force well-nigh demoniacal. He had been tempted similarly before, but he had always resisted. Now he yielded himself up to it, became intoxicated with it. Passing by the cathedral, he went in, as he was sometimes wont to do in the midst of his mental conflicts.

He sat down in the central aisle. Two or three old ladies dressed in black were praying in the grey half light from the lofty windows; the hurrying steps of a priest were heard far away in the darkness, near one of the side entrances; one or two foreigners were moving slowly in the warm light of the large, stained windows in the chancel. Silla, with a sudden feeling of humility, rested his arms on a pew and laid his head on his arms, asking, from the depths of his heart, of the King of Spirits, *Quid me persequeris?*

A deep chilly silence seemed to pass through his soul, like the silence of the cathedral, only more gloomy. It was as though the shadow of the tall pillars had fallen across him and had blotted out all thought. Even the interior of the cathedral, the great living spirit of that poem in granite which rises so nobly in the sunlight, a spirit well ordered, strong and mysterious, like the spirit of the Divine Comedy, became for him entirely silent. A deep, depressing sense of ill-omen fell upon him. His will struggled against it, but in vain; it could not shake off that cloak of lead. He endeavoured to recall the years gone by, when, as a boy, he used to come to the cathedral with his mother, and the sound of the organ summoned up pictures of the far East, of deserts and palm trees and the sunny, peaceful sea. Nothing, nothing of all this remained; his memory had grown numb, his heart was empty and made no response. Someone had flamed through it and shrivelled it up. With dull eyes he followed the few foreigners who were walking about, with hat in hand, gazing up into the air. The frowning pillars made him feel weary, a spirit of drowsiness seemed to rise from the marble floor, the doors, little by little, began to yawn. It was like the leaden calm beneath a dead sea, which has no knowledge of the flight of time. Silla did not repeat his question, since there was no desire to give him a reply. He deliberately searched his memory for some worldly scene of voluptuous delight. He saw himself once again in the *Dart*, amid the racing waves, face to face with Marina, who was bending forwards towards him, her face lit up by the dazzling light of the lake behind her, gleaming with lightning flashes. He felt her little feet pressing against his. The cold, wearisome church became warm and full of life; it gave him keen delight to

fix his eyes on those ascetic stones, to extract from them this light, this sensuous warmth, to recognise the soft, clear voice of the tempter, to yield himself up to it. His imagination ran on to other feverish fantasies. Marina was with him, no longer among the waves, but in her own room at the castle. She whispered to him, 'At last,' took him by the hand, drew him towards her, smiling, with a finger on her lips, in the dark depth of night. . .

He rose and left the church, staggering. God had answered him.

PART IV

MALOMBRA

CHAPTER I

I KNOW IT, I KNOW IT, HE IS HERE ONCE MORE

SILLA was just putting his latchkey in the keyhole, when a telegraph boy accosted him.

'Would you kindly tell me, sir,' he said, 'whether a Signor Corrado Silla lives here?'

'I am he.'

'So much the better. Here is a telegram for you, marked urgent. Do you want a pencil?'

Silla signed the receipt beneath a neighbouring gas-lamp. The telegraph boy walked away. Silla opened the telegram and read:—

'Count Cæsar, who is dangerously ill, desires your presence at the castle. M. di Malombra begs you to come. To-morrow morning at ten o'clock there will be a carriage at the station. CECILIA.'

He left Milan by the first train next morning.

Silla arrived at the station of —— at half-past ten. The day was warm and windy. Outside the station the same young driver was waiting with his little mare.

'Oh,' said he, when he saw Silla, 'it is the same gentleman as last time. We are to drive to the castle, are we not, sir?'

'Have you come for me?'

'That is what I should like to know. I was to have come yesterday morning with the luggage of the bride and bridegroom from the castle. I go to fetch it. Right about turn! They are not going. Then, yesterday evening, when I was sleeping as peacefully as a man after a "three-franc evening"—but not drunk, it is cold water that sends me to sleep—well, I hear a hideous knocking. My old woman (I still have that piece of baggage) goes to the door. There is Rico, the gardener's son, with a written order from the castle to be here at ten o'clock with the horse and trap, empty. Now, for me to be empty at this hour is one of those asinine things which I don't do. Therefore—'

'Enough, enough. And how is the Count?'

'Very well.'

'What! he is not ill?'

'I saw him the other day. He was rather weak, rather old, rather ugly, rather round-shouldered, rather—what shall I say?—rather broken-down; but he was in good health. Of course, he may have been taken ill yesterday.'

'What did they say to you yesterday morning when you went to the castle for the luggage?'

'Nothing at all. The gardener stood at the gate; and when I was some way off he came out into the middle of the road and waved his arms about, like this, to show that I wasn't wanted, and had better clear out; so I said, "Oh! bother!" like that, and turned the mare round and went off to Lecco. I got home late, and went to bed at once.'

Meanwhile, driver and passenger had taken their seats, and the mare trotted along gently with its head close to the ground, carelessly flicking its tail from right

to left as though to flick away the blows, half serious and half jesting, of its master. The latter ceased talking. They passed by trees, and along hedgerows in full flower. Little huts scattered among the fields raised their heads among the mulberry trees, glanced at the travellers, and slowly sank to rest again. The distant mountains formed a moving, changing circle around the winding road. The well-known summits above the lonely lake rose before Silla on the right and left, looming ever larger as his feverish disquiet grew more acute.

The driver could not hold his tongue for long.

'Ah!' he said, 'the other evening there were fine goings on at the castle.'

'Why?'

'Because Donna Marina was married yesterday morning; didn't you know? She was to have been married the evening of the day before yesterday, and then, I don't know why, they changed their plans. To put it shortly, the other evening there was the devil's own display at the castle.' And he went on to give a vivid description of the lights, the fireworks, the music; but Silla did not hear a word.

So she was really married, and yet wrote to him in that manner, with that name! The word *Cecilia* at the end of the telegram seemed to have life, and voice, and passion; it cried out, 'I love you; come!' The day after the wedding! Was the Count really ill or not? If he was not ill, why had not the bride and bridegroom left the castle? His fancy roamed at haphazard; he started when, in the midst of doubts of every kind, there rose up before him, clear in every detail, the picture of the castle, the garden and the lake as he would see them in two hours' time, in an hour and three-quarters, in an hour and a half. A nervous shiver passed through

him. He wondered who would be the first to meet him, what would be said, how he ought to bear himself towards her? And if there was nothing the matter with the Count? If he had been deceived! At every turn of the road these thoughts agitated him more and more. Every now and then he tore himself violently away from them and again nursed the idea of going blindly, with a silenced conscience, wherever the hidden force of circumstances and his own liberated passions might carry him; liberated, yes, at last, after so many foolish, useless conflicts, which had conciliated neither God nor man. That was no road, that white line gleaming ahead of him, sending its clouds of dust all around him; it was a furious torrent along which one never turns back, a stream to drift along henceforward in pleasure and in pain, till it falls into an abyss, the more eagerly desired the deeper it may be. Perhaps he would pass through some hours of splendid delight, as in the fairyland around him, that green poem of laughing hills which leaped down in disorder from the mountains, bearing villas, towers, gardens, garlands of vineyards, and then wound about the small lakes bright with sunshine. And then—

'Might I ask you, sir,' suddenly interposed the driver, 'is it true that the bridegroom has such a heap of money?'

'I don't know.'

'But you know him, sir?'

'No.'

'Well, I've only seen him once or twice, and to my humble way of thinking he must be a . . . What an entrancing creature a beautiful young girl like that is! That's a sign that there is a certain amount of money. And I was born a beggar! They keep on

promising us the next world, us poor folk; but I have a lurking fear that it will be even worse than this one. If in Paradise we are to meet nobody but priests, old women, babies at their mother's breasts, and beggars in rags, then Paradise, sir, is no place for me. Hi!'

And he aimed a furious blow at the poor mare, which was just entering on a paved street between two rows of houses, the last little town on the road to the castle. It was a hot day. The mare stood still before the door of an inn, and her master called out to mine host to bring the usual 'pen and ink.'

'And so,' said the innkeeper's wife, who brought him out his drink, 'and so he is dead, is he?'

'Who is dead?'

'Why, the gentleman at the castle.'

'Who told you so?' exclaimed Silla, turning pale.

'The husband of hump-backed Cecchina who passed by only five minutes ago. Didn't you meet him?'

'Quick, let us be going on,' said Silla.

'I suppose we must be going,' replied the driver, as he handed back the glass to the woman, 'but if he has got a start of us, I'm not going to hurry after him.'

'Drive fast, I tell you.'

The other shrugged his shoulders and whipped up his horse.

'Dead!' said Silla to himself. 'And I was not even giving him a thought!'

He bitterly blamed himself for his selfish forgetfulness, and his heart became full of melancholy regret for his mother's noble-minded friend, for the stern old man who had opened his arms to him in the name of a sacred memory. He had offended him by his secret flight from the castle; he knew this from a letter received from him shortly afterwards at Milan. He had no remorse on this

account, because he believed he had acted honourably; and yet it was bitter for him to reflect that the Count had gone down to the grave with a feeling of resentment towards him. Dead! in half an hour he would see the castle, gloomy, solemn, filled with a chilly silence, surrounded by rugged mountains; like someone whom death has just robbed of his beloved, and who sits, petrified with grief, among his silent friends. And his own insupportable troubles, how strangely small they had become in the shock of the news he had received. A secret door had suddenly opened in front of him; on the other side all was darkness, but the air which came thence was cold and full of calm. To enjoy, to suffer, to love, how long do these things last? When do they come to an end? Above all, how much of them endures?

His heart was beating loudly when from the summit of the last hill the road began to descend towards the lake, which one could now see shining down below in the valley between the leaves of the old chestnut trees.

In the middle of the narrow path leading from the high road to the garden stood Rico, cap in hand, looking very grave.

'Well?' said Silla.

'Just the same,' replied the boy.

'He is alive, then?'

'Yes, sir, yes, sir, the doctors are there now.'

'Which doctors?'

'Our own, the new one, and Father Tosi. He came from Lecco this morning. One moment, sir; here is a letter for you from Signora Donna Marina. You are not to tell anybody that you have seen me, and I am not to say anything about having seen you.'

Silla took the letter, which bore no address. His

hands trembled so that he could not open it. At last he managed to do so, and read, 'Silence as to the telegram.' Meanwhile Rico gave a shrill whistle.

'Why silence?' thought Silla; 'and how is it possible?' Putting away the letter he asked the boy about the Count's illness. He had not been feeling well for some time. On the morning of the previous day he had been found on the ground, between his bed and the door, unconscious, with his face distorted. On being assisted to bed, he rallied a little. Still Giovanna said that he had not recovered speech or reason. This was serious intelligence for Silla. If the Count could neither speak nor understand, how was the telegram from Cecilia to be explained? There might have been a lucid interval. But if the telegram was untruthful, the letter explained itself.

'Who is there at the castle?' he asked.

'Count Nepo, his mother the Countess, Madame Catte, an old gentleman from Venice, who is to sign the register as a witness, and another gentleman who was here with you.'

'Finotti?'

'No, sir.'

'Ferrieri?'

'No, sir.'

'Vezza?'

'Vezza, Vezza, yes, sir, Vezza; he is to sign as the second witness.'

The garden gate stood open. Rico slipped aside among the fir trees and disappeared. Silla walked down towards the flight of stone steps.

And now he sees the cypresses, and the fountain with its peaceful murmur, and over there, between the green vines and the green lake flashing in the sun, the dark roof

of the castle. The even voice of the fountain was saying, in the deep silence of noon, 'I know, I know, I have always known it, he is here once more. Nothing astonishes the careless stream that flows on for ever. I know his story, I know his fate, and hers, and that of the man who lies in the darkened room, in the shadow of death. I know it, I know it. I know the mysterious secret of the man who speaks no more, and the woman who sits alone, shaken by convulsive sobs, with her brow resting on the chill ebony, on the ivory of the ancient chest. This does not disturb my peace. Go, go, descend the hill, mingle the sound of your speech with that of others, mingle with other passions the turbid stream that flows from your own heart, so that they may pass on and vanish together. All this is similar to my own lot. I know it, I know it, I know it.'

Reaching the last step, Silla saw Giovanna pass lightly with bowed head across the loggia from the right wing to the left. He saw her make a disconsolate gesture in reply to somebody who met her, and then hurry away.

The courtyard was deserted; the hall equally so. Going up the stairs, Silla heard footsteps overhead, and, at intervals, a man's voice talking in loud tones. A servant came running up behind him, gave him an astonished glance, wished him good-day, and escorted him to the door of the sitting-room, from which the sound of talking came. Silla, preparing to meet Marina, went in.

Marina was not there. Those present were Countess Fosca, her son, Vezza, another elderly gentleman in black, and Father Tosi, of the Do-well-brotherhood, whom Silla knew by sight, a fine stately man with a high intellectual forehead, aquiline features, and eyes full of life and sar-

donic humour. He barely glanced at the new-comer and went on talking to Vezza; the elderly gentleman rose courteously; Countess Fosca and Nepo looked at him in amazement; Vezza slightly raised his eyebrows and bowed coldly.

Luckily, at this moment, in came Giovanna.

'Ah, dear me,' she said, 'it's Signor Silla!' and she went up to him with tears in her eyes, and her hands crossed on her breast. Ah, what a good thing you have come! Heaven must have put the thought in your mind. Come and see him. He may come, mayn't he, Father Tosi?'

'What are you thinking about, Giovanna?' exclaimed the Countess. 'He has to be kept quiet.'

'Yes, kept quiet, whatever happens,' repeated Nepo.

Silla turned towards the friar, who glanced for a moment at Giovanna with a singularly kind expression, and then said abruptly to Silla,—

'You know the patient?'

'Yes.'

'If it is any pleasure to you not to know or be known by him, go by all means. For the invalid it is all the same up till now.'

Giovanna made a gesture of entreaty.

'My good woman,' said the friar, 'take the gentleman with you, but don't drag heaven too much into the affair. What are you doing?'

The last remark was addressed to the footman, who was laying his table for lunch with cut glass and silver plate.

'What kind of friar do you take me for? Bring me a piece of bread and a glass of wine.'

'I think it is risky,' Nepo went on, as Giovanna left the room with Silla.

'If it were risky I should not have allowed it,' replied the friar.

'I could kiss her,' said he to Vezza. 'I could kiss that poor, little old woman as she trots about like a little mouse, with her little pointed cap, and her little face lit up with human kindness. It's a pleasure to see her.'

The Countess gave a meaning glance.

'What a fall was there,' she said to the elderly gentleman, while the friar hurried over his frugal meal.

'It would make one laugh if it weren't serious. You have to be getting back soon, father, haven't you?'

'I don't know,' replied the friar, drily.

'Oh! we heard you had to be getting back.'

'You heard so!'

And you are not going?'

'I don't know.'

'Oh, dear!' murmured the Countess, who was annoyed.

'Madam,' said the friar, gravely and impressively, 'the case, as I have already said, is a very simple one. Partial paralysis of the right side. The patient may rally, or he may succumb to this first attack, as God will. The origin of the attack is obscure, and I should desire to find it out, with a view to prevent a relapse.'

'But, good gracious, the origin, my dear father—'

The friar met her look with a glance from two flashing eyes.

'It is not necessary for you to make those eyes at me!' exclaimed the irritated Countess. 'You are a first-class professor, but you are not the first I have known, and I have always understood from them that to discuss the cause of an illness is mere waste of words.'

'And my uncle can tell us nothing,' remarked Nepo.

'Madam,' replied the friar, ignoring the last remark, 'Father Tosi is not a university don, and he made two

great mistakes; he wished to be a doctor and he wished to be a friar, whereas, if he had started life as a police detective, he would have had a brilliant career. I wish you good-evening.'

And raising two fingers to his cowl, he left the room.

'A nice way to talk,' said the Countess. 'I think he's quite mad. And the other man! How did he get here? I don't understand it. Let me see,' she said, turning towards the elderly gentleman, 'he is *that friend*. You remember I told you about it, and that it was feared—you understand? Do you think the present was a fitting time for him to come here? And was it becoming, I should like to know, for that old chatterbox, Giovanna, to carry him off to the sick-room? I must ask you, as a personal favour, not to go away and leave me here. It cannot be a long affair—you understand?'

'But how can I arrange it, dear lady?' replied the old Cavaliere, clasping his hands together. 'I am expected at Venice in two days' time.'

'Hush!' said Nepo, placing his ear against the door through which the friar had gone.

Signor Zorzi said no more. Countess Fosca held her breath and looked anxiously towards her son.

'It is nothing,' said Nepo, walking away from the door. 'What was it?'

'I thought I heard someone talking. Signor Zorzi, you are a lawyer; how did you understand what that roguish friar said about the detective police? What did he mean? That we are murderers and robbers? It is intolerable!'

'I shouldn't take it in that way,' said Zorzi; 'he is an eccentric person, and when it occurs to him to make a bombastic remark, out it comes!'

'Police detectives, indeed! A nice way to talk,'

repeated Nepo, striding up and down the room, fuming.

A door was opened very gently, and Catte's long nose peeped in. Countess Fosca and Nepo hurried up to her. The advocate moved forwards, but politely halted a few paces behind the others, who held a short, whispered consultation with Catte, and she then withdrew. The door closed, and mother and son turned gloomily towards the lawyer, who asked eagerly,—

'Well, how do things stand?

'It's no good,' replied the disconsolate Countess, 'she won't see me.'

'Not even you, Countess!'

'Oh, dear! Fancy me having to deal with all these complications. Do you see your way through them?'

'I could not honestly say that I do.'

'We must bring matters to a head and have done with it. You must see her, Nepo, by hook or by crook, and talk to her, and explain things to her, and find out if she is ill, and what she feels, and what she wants.'

Nepo jerked the *pince-nez* from his nose.

'You don't understand the affair,' he said. 'Let me speak!' he added, seeing that she wished to interpose; and then he continued, with his oracular manner, 'Don't let us do anything foolish. It is not a question of insisting. We should only irritate her. I have enough good feeling, my dear mother, to understand that at such a time we must respect the sorrow of an affectionate niece. She will desire the wedding to be postponed. Be it so. I am not an impatient person. You understand, mother?'

As the advocate looked at the Countess, he had an ironical, and at the same time a pitying, expression in his eyes,

Nepo went up to him, buttonholed him, and talked to him, almost touching his face with his nose.

'So honourable and so shrewd a man as yourself will readily understand to what point interest and etiquette can walk hand-in-hand, and you will not think it unbecoming if I mention that another serious consideration arises just now. I am disinterested, that is understood; but—bravo!' he exclaimed, stepping back, 'I see you understand. The deed of gift! I pray that Heaven may preserve our dear uncle for many years, but if a misfortune were to occur! The deed of gift in my favour was to have been signed yesterday morning. Will he ever be in a fit state to sign it? He must be watched day and night. We cannot allow a lucid interval to pass.'

'Quite so, and also,' said the lawyer, gravely, 'assuming that there is this lucid interval, assuming that it is extremely lucid, and that the doctor is present, so that everything may be done in order, and that we may not put ourselves in a compromising position.'

The voice of Father Tosi was heard in the loggia.

'I am going to inquire after my uncle,' said Nepo, and went out.

'After all,' said the Countess, 'my son was right about that matter of the police detective. It was a most insulting remark.'

'Most insulting. I shall have a word with that friar, with your permission, Countess.'

'Certainly; do anything you like. Dear me, what a heap of trouble. One hardly knows where one is. It is impossible to make head or tail of it. Here people get married and don't get married. Here there is no regular hour for dinner, and no regular hour for bed. And all in Heaven's name— Oh, what a life to lead, what a life to lead!'

A footman came in to clear away. He did not hurry himself; he seemed to be playing with the plates and dishes.

'Go after Nepo,' said the Countess to the lawyer; 'I am going to lie down for a little. I didn't sleep a wink last night, and I am worn out. Just send Catte to me,' she said to the footman, and when he had left the room she added, 'see if you can't worm something out of that Signor Silla.'

Silla had not gone direct to the Count's room. He had first made Giovanna narrate the events of the last two days. Poor Giovanna! She spoke in a low, sad voice, that seemed to come from a distance, from a world of pain.

The wedding had been fixed for the evening of the 29th. Donna Marina, at the last moment, had had it put off till the morning of the 30th. However, there was the display of fireworks on the lake, and the music as arranged. The Count seemed to be amused, and to be in his usual health. Some days before he had been slightly indisposed, but had said no more about it. He looked shaken, but so he had for many a long day. Giovanna was expressive in her reticence; she seemed to mentally trace the Count's failing health to the date of Silla's departure from the castle. Well, that evening passed off without incident. The wedding was to take place at seven in the morning. At five Giovanna had to fetch some keys from the Count's bedroom, and had found him half dead on the floor with all the symptoms of apoplexy. At this point, whether from emotion or some other cause, she broke off her narrative. She resumed it by saying that the doctor and parish priest were sent for, and that the former, an excellent practitioner who had recently succeeded the old doctor, con-

sidering the case most serious, had at once asked for a second opinion, and suggested that the last rites of religion should be administered. The patient being speechless and unconscious, the priest could only anoint him with the holy oil. It happened that Father Tosi was away from home, and had only arrived a few hours before Silla. During the day the Count had neither got better nor worse. In the evening, the doctor was glad to find only a slight feverishness, which increased a little during the night. The features were more composed, the eye less glassy, and even the lips now and again moved as though trying to speak. Giovanna believed that if he could recognise Silla it would give him great comfort. 'He can have no other,' she added.

'And the wedding?' asked Silla.

'Oh, dear!' replied Giovanna. 'Signora Donna Marina has not set foot outside her door since the evening of the 29th. It seems that she is ill, for yesterday morning she sent for a quantity of ice. She will not see either her *financé* or the Countess. Nobody goes to her room but her maid and the boy—her boatman. Ah, dear Lord, all that I care for is for my master to recover, and all the rest of them may—! . Come with me, sir. How thankful I should be if he is able to recognise you.'

On entering the close, darkened room, the head of the sick man could barely be discerned, like a dark stain on the white pillow, while near the window sat the doctor in attendance. Giovanna went up to the bed with Silla, bent over the poor invalid, and whispered a few words. The Count looked at Silla with dull, glazed eyes, then he slowly turned them towards Giovanna and his lips moved. She placed her ear close to them, and with difficulty caught the one word—

'*Beive.*'

For many years no word of his native dialect had passed his lips, unless in moments of resentment; it came back to him now when the shadow of death was upon him. Apoplexy had struck him down like a flash of lightning, had robbed him in a moment of his imperious will, of his quick intelligence, his tenacious memory; had pushed him back from sturdy old age to childhood, sweeping from his mind everything but the words learnt in infancy.

Giovanna gave him something to drink, then she again attempted to call his attention to Silla.

'That's enough,' said the voice of the doctor in the darkness.

The poor woman went out with Silla, in great grief. In the passage they met the friar.

'No sign of recognition, eh?' he said.

'I expected as much. And what do you think about it?' sighed Giovanna.

'The end is not far off, my poor woman. Though, if there is no second attack, it may make a difference. Certainly there must be no more foul play, or it will kill him straight off. You said nothing to this gentleman?'

'No, sir!'

'Very well; now listen to me. I want you to show me over the house. After that, you will give me a chair in the loggia so that I can smoke. If I don't smoke within a quarter of an hour I shall burst.'

While Giovanna and the friar went round the house, Silla, leaning over the wall of the loggia, looked down on the green waters of the lake asleep in the sunshine. Had so many months really passed? The mountains, the profound quiet, seemed to claim him as their own

It seemed as though he had never gone away, and to have only dreamt about Milan, and a long winter, and anxious thoughts. But from the stone walls—the old, stern walls—there leaped out suddenly the actual present, the terror which a mortal malady diffuses about the man stricken down, and over all floated the image of her who, lurking in the shadow, yet filled the house with her presence. Why did she hide away? At every moment he seemed to hear her step, and the rustle of her dress, and to see her approaching in the pride of her peerless beauty. He turned round, to see nothing but the empty loggia, and began to listen.

That was she perhaps! No. It was only the Salvadors' friend, the lawyer, Giorgio Mirovich, walking lightly along. He greeted Silla with a formal 'Servant, sir," and went away towards the Count's room. He soon returned, and speaking half in Venetian, half in Italian, asked Silla whether he had seen the friar. Hearing that he was going round the house with Giovanna, he added, 'That friar has a rather curious way of talking,' and he stood still and talked. The most honest of men, but slavishly devoted to Countess Fosca, an old flame of his, his manners were sometimes bluff, sometimes courtly, his speech at once frank and cautious. He was aiming at finding out how Silla heard of the Count's illness. Silla replied that it was the talk of the neighbourhood, and that the most serious rumours had reached him. He did not let him know exactly where he had heard the news, or from what place he had started that morning, although he had no doubt they could easily find out from the driver. The advocate, who objected to indirect questions, did not press the point. He confided to Silla his profound aversion to these inhospitable regions, to these mountains with their sides straight as

brick walls, to this house of melancholy. Both he and his old friend were longing to hear the '*Sia premi*,' '*Sia stali*,' of the Venetian gondoliers.

At last the friar came back and Silla went into the garden. Vezza was amusing himself by throwing bread crumbs to the gold fish. Silla avoided him and crossed the court, making for the iron gate. Passing by the boat-house, he glanced at the boats, and at the little secret staircase which leads to the right wing of the castle. It was silent and deserted. Passing through the gate, he went for a few yards along the road to M—— and then turned back.

Up there the well-known corner window was closed. The setting sun lit up the Venetian blinds, the big grey wall and the shining leaves of the magnolia in the garden on the terrace. Of human life there was no sign. Silla went for a long walk along the most solitary paths, and came back to the same side of the castle. The window was still closed, although the sun now struck only on the top of the roof. Silla went back into the castle with a presentiment that Marina would give no sign of life during the day, but that he would see her that night.

CHAPTER II

A MYSTERY

THE dinner was a sad one. Father Tosi rose from the table immediately after the soup, to go and see the Count, and did not return again. The Countess and Nepo ate their dinner in low spirits. Vezza was ready to talk, fearing that this melancholy silence would give him indigestion. He singled out the advocate, Mirovich, and talked to him about Venice and his friends there, of the iced coffee, of the Venetian Institute and the gondolas, dragging in Virgil headlong:

Convulsum remis, rostrisque tridentibus æquor.

The lawyer was bored, and gave curt replies, but the commendatore continued to drone along between one mouthful and another, now and then venturing on a little laugh, such an aid to digestion! Silla, like the Salvadors, was silent. The Countess eyed him narrowly as he bent over his soup, and again every time that the footman handed him anything. She evidently suffered beneath the forced silence, and kept glancing meaningly at Nepo, as much as to say,—'I am going to speak; I can hold out no longer.' Nepo looked at her hard with his large, weak eyes, closing her lips.

After dinner Giovanna appeared, and whispered in her

ear that Father Tosi was preparing to leave, and before doing so desired a conference with the members of the family, as arranged with the family lawyer.

'Tell the Marchioness,' replied Fosca.

'I have told her ladyship, but she says she cannot come.'

'Tell her that we will go to her.'

'Oh, she has already said that she will see no one.'

Silla rose quickly from the table, and, with a bow, left the room.

'He has taken the hint,' said Nepo. 'Can you tell us, Giovanna, how that gentleman came here, and who told him to stay?'

'How he came I don't know. I was one of those who begged him to stay because I know his lordship was so upset when he went away, and if he can only recognise him, it will do him so much good. Besides, his lordship always told me to keep his room in readiness in case he should come back.'

'It was not your business to ask him to stay,' said Nepo. 'Under present circumstances you should have taken orders from the Marchioness, and mine, too, I think I may say. Now, you can tell the father that we await him in Countess Salvador's sitting-room. You will stay, Commendatore Vezza, as a friend of my uncle's. A true friend, be it understood, for there are some other friends whom I would not treat on the footing of members of the family.'

Commendatore Vezza, glad to have his curiosity gratified, bowed and smiled.

The friar followed the others almost immediately into the Countess's room, and, touching his cowl, sat down, without waiting to be invited, in a big arm-chair near the sofa where Countess Fosca, greatly agitated, sat nervously

striking her knees with her closed fan. The advocate, Mirovich, with some embarrassment, and looking now at the friar, now at the floor, began as follows:—

'To explain the words—the—ambiguous words, the ambiguous words used by the father this morning in the presence of the Count and Countess, and—ah—of other persons, he desires to make a further communication. I believe that is so? A communication touching the illness about which he has been summoned to advise.'

'As to desiring,' said the friar, 'I don't desire at all. It is my duty. I take short cuts, ladies and gentlemen, and I call things by their names. My duty is to inform you that, in my opinion, Count d'Ormengo has been—' Before he could finish the sentence Countess Fosca dropped her fan, and Nepo rose to his feet. The other two men did not move.

'Murdered,' said the friar, slowly, after a moment's hesitation, raising his eyes towards Nepo, with his arms crossed,

'Good God!' groaned the Countess, falling back breathless against the sofa. Nepo gave an exclamation of contemptuous incredulity, gesticulating with his hands. The advocate endeavoured to soothe him and his mother, making signs with hands and head that they need not be alarmed, and had better wait. Nepo yielded, but the Countess kept repeating, louder and louder, 'Good God! good God!' and burst into tears.

'You might have been more prudent, father,' Mirovich remarked brusquely, as he leant over the Countess to support her and give her courage.

'Oh, gracious heavens,' she sobbed, 'what—horrible—words—and after dinner, too!'

'Madam,' said the friar, 'the interests of the invalid demand that I should speak clearly and without delay.

Moreover, I am in the habit of speaking the truth, even after dinner.'

'Proceed, proceed!' exclaimed the lawyer; 'explain yourself quickly.'

'I should have done so already had this lady and gentleman been less impatient. I do not intend to suggest that arms and poison have been employed. A child can recognise apoplexy; and the present case is one of apoplexy, beyond a doubt. I call it murder, because I am convinced that the originating cause of the misfortune was an act of violence by an individual.'

'That is absurd,' cried Nepo.

'You are absurd, my dear sir,' replied the friar, laying stress on each syllable, and giving him a glance, half ironical, half defiant. 'You are absurd. For example, I have heart disease, you have not; and those I love can kill me without daggers or poison.'

'So you say—' interposed Vezza, to cut short the heated dialogue.

'I say,' replied the friar, 'that the patient was struck down by apoplexy while violently, terribly agitated.'

'But how?—but how?' asked the weeping Countess. 'In heaven's name, how? Don't keep us so long on tenter-hooks. Speak, in the name of goodness! Do you want to kill us by inches?'

'Before proceeding,' said the friar, 'I wish to know whether all the members of the family are present?'

Nobody replied.

'Are all here?' repeated the friar.

Somebody, in a low tone, remarked,—

'The young Marchioness is not here.'

'The Marchioness, my *fiancée*,' said Nepo, with emphasis, 'is indisposed.'

'What is her name?' asked the friar.

'Marchesina Crusnelli di Malombra.'

'Her Christian name!'

'Marina,' said Nepo.

After a moment's silence the friar remarked,—

'Marina. Has she not other names?'

'Yes. Marina Vittoria; but what does that matter?'

'It matters a great deal, Count. It matters very much. What are the names of the women-servants, besides Giovanna?'

'Catte, for one,' replied the Countess.

'Fanny,' suggested Vezza. No other name was mentioned.

'Now,' continued the friar, 'is there no woman in the castle called Cecilia?'

'No,' they replied, one after the other.

'Nevertheless, I am convinced that the other night a woman, one Cecilia, entered Count Cæsar's room, and irritated him, terrified him to death.'

All held their breath. The Salvadors and Vezza stared at the friar, open-mouthed, Mirovich sat with eyes downcast and his chin on his breast, as though he had been prepared for what the friar had just said. The latter rose and stood in the centre of the room.

'Over there,' he said, pointing to the wall on his left, 'is the bed; the Count was picked up here in his night-shirt, face downwards, with his arms stretched out towards the door. This you know already. But there are other things which you do not know. The door in the passage, which the Count always closes on going to bed, was open. On the bed Giovanna found a glove; here it is.'

From his pocket he produced a tiny little glove. Vezza and Nepo both took hold of it, and hurried to the window to examine it closely. Nepo at once exclaimed,—

'Good gracious! this is not a glove! It was once, who knows when, a five-and-a-quarter or five-and-a-half one-buttoned glove; a glove for a little girl twelve years old; now it is a mouldy, faded rag.'

'Well, that rag, which cannot belong to the Count, did not fall into his bed but was thrown there, for the bed is a big one, and the glove was found squeezed in between the bolster and the wall. The Count's candlestick, the snuffers, the glass which always stands on the little table beside his bed, were scattered about the floor near the door. He must have knocked them over in a fit of passion, after vainly groping for the matches, which he must have brushed off the table, for they were scattered about near the foot of the bed. The glass was certainly knocked over while full of water, for there were splashes on the floor, and the right sleeve of the Count's nightshirt was dripping wet. I follow up this clue, and seeing that the glass was intact, I infer that it struck against a soft and yielding body, which broke its fall and saved it from breaking. What could this have been? But it is clear what it could—what it must have been. It must have been the dress off which came this button.'

Nepo took the button which the friar held out to him. It was a big button covered with blue-and-white material. Nepo recognised it at once. It belonged to a tea-gown of Marina's.

'H'm! I've never seen it,' he said, examining it carefully.

'Perhaps her ladyship can assist us. Show it to her.'

'You mean the Countess? Oh, she is certain not to know anything. Isn't it true, mamma, that I know more about these things than you do? If I had seen anyone in the house wearing buttons like this, if only for a moment, I should recognise it in a minute, shouldn't I?'

Countess Fosca was longing to look, but she saw by Nepo's eyes that he forbade her to do so. She did not know what to do.

'Oh, dear,' she said, 'yes, that is true. But—for two seconds—eh? I may just glance at it.'

'Just imagine,' replied Nepo, and he gave her a meaning look. 'Well,' he went on, 'look at it then, though it's unnecessary.'

The Countess took the button, rose from the sofa and went to the window, where she remained for some minutes, her forehead almost touching the glass and her back turned to the others, who stood waiting in silence.

At last she turned round and handed back the button to Nepo, remarking to the friar, who watched her with his head bent and his hands at his side,—

'I know nothing.'

The friar did not reply and did not move. He kept looking at her. He noticed how completely curiosity had vanished from her face, while the mouth said, 'I do not understand.'

'Nothing at all,' repeated the Countess, in tranquil tones.

'Where was it found?' asked Nepo, hurriedly.

The friar was still silently following the Countess with his eyes as she went back to the sofa. At last he roused himself and replied to Nepo.

'It was found in the Count's clenched hand, the left one. You will have noticed a torn fragment of material hanging from the button. It was clearly pulled off the dress by force.'

'Quite so,' said the advocate.

Vezza gave him an ironical glance. The shrewd commendatore suspected that the button had been identified

from the beginning, and so thought it prudent not to intervene at that moment between the Salvadors and the friar.

'Giovanna,' continued the latter, 'who was the first to enter the room, noticed some of these things without knowing what to think of them. At first she thought a thief had been there, not a likely thing; then she found his keys, money, and pocket-book untouched on the chest of drawers, where they still are; so no thieves had been about. Then she thought that the Count, feeling unwell, had wished to call for aid, to go in search of it; but this theory is absurd, because it does not explain the glove, or the glass and candlestick on the floor; it does not explain why the Count did not ring the bell. Still, Giovanna has grasped, in a confused way, the fact that there is a mystery. She spoke to nobody, so as to avoid arousing baseless suspicions, but confided in me, perhaps on account of the cloth I wear. I proceeded as follows.'

The Countess, Nepo and Vezza hung breathlessly on his lips.

'The patient's intellectual faculties are greatly clouded, but the doctor in attendance tells me that since yesterday evening there is an occasional glimmer of intelligence. Hereupon I closely questioned Giovanna, drew my own inferences and formed my own opinion. Then I interrogated the invalid.'

Countess Fosca's big fan dropped from her hand and slid off her lap. She did not stoop to pick it up, nor did anyone else.

'Owing to his condition I had to speak to him several times for a few moments at a time. It was not supposed that he could do more than reply *yes* or *no*. I began by asking whether anyone had entered his room during the night. No answer. I repeated the question. Per-

haps it was too long, for he only looked at me and did not attempt to reply either by words or signs. Then I asked him in so many words—a man? Still he does not answer. A woman? Ah! the eyes and lips move, there is something they wish to say. I leave him undisturbed for an hour. The faculties of understanding and speech had made progress. He asked Giovanna for something to drink. As soon as the doctor had gone I resumed the attempt. I say to him: The name of that woman? He does not reply; but a moment later as I was leaning over him with a wax taper, to examine the state of his skin, he looks at me and begins to stammer. I place my ear near his lips, and it seems to me that I catch the word "family"; I imagine that he wishes to see them, and I say something in reply, and tell him not to worry about them. He continues to murmur something. I listen again and seem to catch another word, and I try the effect of repeating it—Cecilia?

'He is silent at once, and I only wish that all of you could have seen how his eyes dilated, how they looked at me, and the expression which passed over the convulsed features of the man. One thing more. Who, besides the Count, sleeps in the right wing of the castle?'

'Why do you ask that?' said Nepo.

'Assuming that some person besides the invalid sleeps in the right wing of the castle, that person (here the friar raised his voice and knit his brows), still more so if unwell, must have heard, and must know something. I advise you to closely interrogate her.'

'I have the honour to inform you, father,' said Nepo, with heightened colour, and speaking in his *ex cathedra* style, 'that if by such words you intend to suggest unlawful and scandalous suspicions against a lady who is about to enter into the closest ties with me, that you

have mistaken your *role*, and are insulting those whom you now address.'

'You do not know what you are saying, my dear sir,' replied the friar, in a low tone, with forced calmness, but you do know that I am in the habit of seeking for the truth, even if I have to take a knife and probe living flesh and bones, those of a grand lady as calmly as those of a railway porter. I cut and tear in order to find it, and I do find it almost always, unmoved as a deity; it matters little to me that people swear at and abuse me. And you imagine that I shall abstain from ever hinting at the truth to avoid offending a lady, her relations, and friends, when I know that what I am doing is in the interests of a sick man. But you make me laugh, you do indeed. For the rest, ladies and gentlemen, you now know the facts. You will remember that, should the invalid rally, a second shock similar to the last will kill him on the spot. Father Tosi has done his duty, and is now going.'

He got up and looked at the clock. His trap must be waiting for him on the high road at the end of the avenue.

'It is understood,' said the lawyer, 'that the father will not mention outside—'

'This is the first time that such instructions have been given to me, and I decline to receive them. I wish you all good evening.'

'In whose pay is he?' whispered Mirovich to Nepo, after he had gone out.

'What on earth was the doctor thinking about to suggest that rogue?' said Nepo, avoiding a reply. 'If I had only known that he would be a day late, I would have sent for Namias from Venice. I am afraid you are upset, mamma.'

'Upset. Of course I am upset,' groaned the Countess.

'Of course, the confounded scoundrel! You must lie down and rest,' said Nepo, with a new air of filial anxiety. 'Let us go away and leave her by herself. I confess myself that I am dying for a breath of fresh air. Would you be so good, Mirovich, as to go and inquire how my uncle is. I am going to get my hat, and shall walk across the court. You can let me know from the loggia if he is going on satisfactorily, as I hope he is.'

After ten o'clock the same evening the Salvadors, Vezza, Mirovich and Silla were standing round the dining-room table. They were listening to the account which the doctor was giving of his patient before going home. The doctor, dressed in black cloth cut in the fashion of twenty years before, was discoursing about the case, and overwhelming these modest city gentlemen with a string of Greek and Latin names, and quotations from text-books and scientific journals. The lamp in the middle of the table, with its large, dark shade, left the room and the people in it in the shadow, and threw upon the tablecloth a circle of light which included within its circumference the large, red hands of the loquacious doctor. In his opinion, the position of affairs was on the whole satisfactory. The right leg had partially recovered the power of movement, and the arm also was no longer completely inert. In the understanding and the power of speech, the progress made was, it is true, less marked, but one might, indeed one ought to believe that with time much might be done; if not a complete recovery, at least—

He had reached this sanguine stage of his diagnosis, when he stopped short, raising his chin and looking, with half-closed eyes, beyond the listening circle around

him. He then made a bow. Everybody turned round; it was Donna Marina.

The group round the doctor broke up in confusion. Countess Fosca and Nepo went towards Marina, the others making room; and all this took place quietly without a word being spoken. Nepo looked at his *fiancée* with with two large stupid eyes, which had a frightened look in them.

'Good evening,' whispered Marina. As the doctor made no reply, she repeated, rather louder, in her careless way, 'I beg you to proceed.'

She was dressed in black or dark blue; it was not easy to see which. In the half light one barely distinguished the beautiful figure, the large eyes, the white face and neck. She looked once over her shoulder, as though looking for a seat. Nepo urged her to sit on the sofa, but she chose an arm-chair immediately opposite to the doctor.

'At least,' continued the latter, hesitating, magnetised by the large eyes fixed upon him, 'at least the use of the legs, and, perhaps, also the partial use of the arm. These, I say, may be partially recovered, and the intellectual faculties—ah, there is much difficulty about that.'

The intonations of his voice seemed involuntarily to be influenced by Marina's eyes.

Vezza, who was near her, studied those eyes attentively, managing to avoid being observed by the Salvadors. There was a wandering, feverish light in them, an expression of intense curiosity, something new which aroused Vezza's attention.

Somebody comes in; it is the parish priest, come to hear the latest bulletin. Poor Don Innocenzo, short-sighted and nervous, could not tell one person from another, greeted people by the wrong names, apologised,

and kept breathing with pursed-up lips as though the floor burnt his feet. Meanwhile the doctor took his leave. A chill seemed to fill the room; nobody ventured to speak above a whisper. Nepo, bending over Marina's arm-chair, inquired *sotto voce* after her health, and said how grieved he had been to see nothing of her during the last two days. On the other side of the chair was Countess Fosca, who was in doubt what to do. She leant over to Marina and whispered in her ear, then she withdrew so as not to get between Marina and Nepo; then she again yielded to her first impulse. The priest was hearing Mirovich's account of the Count, standing a little towards one side. Silla had not stirred. As she entered the room Marina had glanced at him for an instant, fixing him, as though petrified, to his post.

She now rose.

'I should like to speak a word to Signor Silla,' she said.

The latter bowed, turning very pale.

The Countess, Nepo and Vezza looked at Marina in amazement, expecting an outburst, a scene like that of the previous year. The advocate broke off his narrative. Don Innocenzo, not understanding why, said,—

'Well, well.'

'Not here,' said Marina.

Vezza and Mirovich at last made signs of withdrawing. The Salvadors did not move.

'Remain here, please,' Marina continued. 'I must get some fresh air. Will you come into the garden, Signor Silla?'

The latter bowed once more.

'Into the garden?' exclaimed Countess Fosca, with a brusque gesture of annoyance

'On such a chilly night?' she added presently; 'I do not think—'

'In this damp air?' said Nepo. 'The loggia would be better!'

'Good evening,' said Marina, 'I am going to take a turn, and then I shall go to my own rooms.' Nepo wished to make some rejoinder, and nervously stammered out a few words. Donna Marina took a step towards the door and looked hard at Silla, who was holding it open for her.

'Good evening,' she said again.

Nobody answered her.

Marina slowly descended the broad, dark staircase, with the noiseless step of a fairy. Silla kept close behind her, with a choking sensation of inexpressible emotions, walking like one half blind. Another minute and he would be alone with her, out in the night.

The glass door leading to the garden was wide open. The hanging lamp in the vestibule, waving in the breeze, shone outside upon a stretch of red gravel, and, near the door, upon Marina's white shawl thrown across a chair. She handed the shawl to Silla, and stood still for him to put it on for her. Their hands met; they were cold as ice.

'It is cold,' said Marina, drawing her shawl about her. The voice was tremulous and unlike hers. Silla made no reply; he thought she must hear the beating of his heart. For an instant his hands rested on her arm as he rearranged the shawl for her. She trembled, and her shoulders and bosom heaved. She stepped out silently into the night; walked about fifty yards down the avenue and then leant over the parapet and looked down at the lake.

The night was dark. But few stars shone in the cloudy

sky, between the huge, black mountains whose dark outlines sloped down to the lake. The murmur of the fountains, the distant chirp of the crickets in the fields, went and came with the breeze.

Silla only saw the graceful white figure bending over the parapet beside him.

'Cecilia,' he said, quietly, drawing nearer to her. She rested her chin in both hands. Then she held out one to Silla without turning round, and said to him passionately,—

'Yes, always call me that. Do you remember?'

He pressed with both his own that little hand of perfumed satin. He feared to appear cold, his senses seemed to leave him at that moment. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it passionately on the wrists.

'Tell me; do you remember?' repeated Marina.

'Oh, Cecilia!' he said.

He turned round her hand in his, glanced rapidly at the palm, pressed it across his eyes and said, deeply agitated,—

'There is no world for me now, nor relations, nor friends, nor past, nor present; nothing, nothing, except you; take me, take me, body and soul!'

He wished to rouse himself and he st[illegible] He pressed that little hand to his lips, and [illegible] the bitterness of his life, of the injusti[illegible] threw into that kiss a smothered spa[illegible] thrilled her to the heart.

'No, no,' said she, in a brok[illegible] now.'

Both of them were fever-st[illegible]

'When did you rememb[illegible]

She had in her mind t[illegible]

[illegible] the light o[illegible] voice

who had re-found, in her second existence on earth, her first lover.

'Yesterday evening,' he said, believing that he understood the question. Yesterday evening at Signora De Bella's, who spoke to me about you; after that they played some music which completely carried me away. I leave the house half mad, and find your telegram. Then everything became clear to me, I felt that fate had seized me and was carrying me here. Leave me this little hand, this world of sweetness. You do not know what my love for you is. I feel as though it will kill me if I cannot tell you all, and the words fail me. I wish I could be drawn down for ever with you through the waves that are calling to me now.'

He drew towards him the lifeless, imprisoned hand, her arm, her whole form.

'To-morrow,' whispered Marina, resisting; 'to-morrow night after eleven o'clock I will be at the boat-house.'

He would not let go of that little hand, he kept his insatiable lips pressed against it.

'Come,' she said, suddenly roused, 'follow me at a distance, do not speak, and at the doorway leave me. I knew it.'

Silla understood and obeyed. He had hardly gone two steps when he saw someone in the shadow. It was Catte.

'Ah, your ladyship is here. I have been looking everywhere for you. Her Excellency told me to bring you this shawl.'

Marina did not deign to reply, or even to look at the Countess's maid; in the doorway she bowed coldly to Silla, and disappeared in the vestibule.

Silla walked across the courtyard, went a little way up the flight of stone steps, and stepping out on one side sat

down on the grass beneath a cypress, drinking in the rich perfume, while his eyes wandered along the black column to the stars above.

Later on Countess Fosca, *tête-à-tête* with Nepo in his bedroom, wept wildly, inveighing against the friar who had said all these horrible things, and against the Milanese lady who had first told them about Marina; she kept on asking what there could possibly be between Marina and her uncle. What she could have said? What she could have done that night? and protested that she personally was losing her head and could stand no more of it, that she must get Nepo away, cost what it might, and that she would abandon that ill-starred house and its master and its mistress, and the money and everything else. When she had finished she began all over again. Nepo was angry and said nothing; only, when his mother raised her voice too much, he made a gesture of impatience. At first she resented his conduct, and said, 'What do you mean, saying nothing?' But Nepo became more enraged. Then the poor woman humbled herself before him, and mournfully repeated, 'Nepo, she is mad! Nepo, she is mad!'

She wished to send for the advocate and take his opinion. Nepo opposed this idea so resolutely that she believed he had already a plan of his own, asking him what he intended to do.

'To wait,' he replied, 'and do nothing to compromise us.'

'The deed of gift, darling, is what I am afraid about. He is getting worse.'

'Wait,' repeated Nepo.

'All very well to talk!'

He jerked off his *pince-nez*, seized his mother by the arms, looked her straight in the face, and in a voice choking with passion said,—

'If there is no will?'

The Countess reflected for a moment, looking at him.

'Everything will be hers?' she said. 'Marina will have everything.'

Nepo stepped back and made a gesture of approval.

'Eh!' said he, adding, 'in that case we will think about it.'

A long silence followed.

'One of your buttons is coming off, darling,' said the Countess, affectionately.

Nepo looked at the button, which was dangling from his coat, and replied in the same tone,—

'Momolo, who never looks. I am going to see the Count.'

'And this evening's affair?' said the Countess, as he walked away. 'A nice state of things!'

'I don't trouble my head about that,' said Nepo. 'You have just heard from Catte how she saw them walking back to the house. Besides, judging from what Marina herself said, I don't believe that she offered him either excuses or soft words. You will see that to-morrow, not to say this evening, the man will leave the castle. What have you got into your head? After his leaving the last time in such a way and for such a reason! He told Mirovich how he happened to come this time, having heard in the neighbourhood of the Count's illness. Well, I am off.'

In the passage he came across Catte, talking to the advocate, and Vezza, who were smoking. On seeing her master, Catte disappeared; the other two had not heard how the patient was since the doctor left. Nepo went off on tip-toe to find out, and the two men resumed their conversation. They were talking of the curious events

which were taking place beneath their eyes; Vezza with the interest displayed by a selfish and inquisitive man, Mirovich with a certain regret due to his sincere devotion to Countess Fosca. They made a hundred conjectures, but always had to admit once more, with the Countess, that they could make nothing of it. Mirovich concluded by calling it a hopeless imbroglio. After a long silence, Vezza made some remark about the profound stillness of the night; and his companion, thinking of Venice in bygone years, hummed the first bar of the popular song which begins—'*Stanote de Nina.*'

'Very pretty, very pretty! Go on!' said Vezza. Just then Nepo returned to the loggia.

'How is he?' asked the advocate.

'Worse, a good deal worse,' said Nepo, and passed on.

'This is a bad business,' sighed the lawyer.

'I should think it was.'

For a moment the fountain in the courtyard behind them could be heard talking to itself.

'His health was already shaken,' said the commendatore.

'Oh, yes.'

'And he lived a solitary life,' Vezza went on.

'Very.'

'Almost, almost—'

'Oh, I believe so myself.'

The mild voice of the fountain was heard talking to itself. Vezza threw away his cigar.

'What awful poison!' he said. 'Well,' he added, after a brief pause.

'Well, what?'

'The little song.'

'Ah, here it is. *Stanote de Nina—*'

The lawyer lowered his voice, and the light north wind that passed through the arches dissolved and carried away the amorous notes.

In his bedroom, where a small feeble lamp, placed on the floor, sent a certain sepulchral gleam through the hot close air, lay Count Cæsar, motionless. He did not see Giovanna, who was sitting close beside him, with her hands crossed on her knees and her eyes fixed upon him. He thought that he saw before him the face of his niece, who was standing upright in the centre of the room. It was his niece and another person at the same time; that struck him as quite natural. She moved, and spoke, and gazed at him with two eyes filled with madness; how could that be, since this person was dead and buried long ago? He knew quite well that she had been buried, for he remembered having heard so from his father; but where, where? Torturing forgetfulness! Somewhere in his memory there was that place, that name; he felt it stirring, rising, rising until it stood out in letters that could be seen.

He believed that he then raised his right arm from beneath the sheets, pointing the forefinger at her, and that he told her she was lying, for she had been buried at Oleggio, in the family vault. But the woman still kept threatening him, defied him, threw a glove at him; she looked like Marina, and was really his father's first wife, Countess Cecilia Varrega. He heard her voice, she spoke of crimes committed long ago, of a *vendetta* to be accomplished. Then he imagined that he sprang, mad with anger, out of bed, and everything became confused in his mind in one vision of horror, on which he breathlessly dwelt, as though on the threshold of death there appeared to him beyond, a dread, superhuman tragedy.

There was an unexpected relapse, the paralysis was threatening the lungs.

The castle had never appeared more gloomy than it did that night, in spite of the lights which kept watch there until the dawn.

CHAPTER III

PEACE

'How nice it is to see you! How nice it is to see you!' said Marta, as she hurried up the parsonage stairs to place their luggage in the rooms prepared for Edith and her father, and to throw open doors and windows. Then she called out to Don Innocenzo below,—

'Are you happy now?' And she rushed downstairs again, hot and excited, protesting that the parsonage was not the castle, and that they had not this, and they had not that. She was longing to give Edith a kiss, but did not dare. Steinegge, as dusty as an old bottle of Bordeaux, protested, for his part, against so much ceremony, and kept rubbing his hands and gesticulating. Don Innocenzo, whose eyes were bright with pleasure, said he was right and Marta wrong, and that he believed that his guests would be comfortable in his house; otherwise he would not have invited them. Marta then turned on her master. 'But what things you are saying? Am I to hear such things from you?'

'Well, well,' replied the poor priest, noticing her excitement, 'come, come, calm yourself. She is a good creature,' he added, turning to the Steinegges; 'she has worked very hard to get things ready for you.'

Here Steinegge protested afresh, and Marta, in despair

at having such a master, hurried away to the kitchen so as not to lose her respect for him.

'But tell me, young lady,' asked Don Innocenzo of Edith, 'have I said anything wrong? You know yourselves that I am only a poor parish priest.'

'Great people like ourselves sometimes condescend,' replied Edith, jesting.

The little house was bright and cheerful. There was not a speck of dust on the furniture or on the windows; the white muslin curtains, which had just been washed and ironed, diffused a pearl-coloured light through the little rooms, which smelt clean and fresh. In the dining-room, on the ground floor, a solitary sparrow chirped cheerfully near the two doors leading to the garden; while in the middle of the table stood a white porcelain vase full of flowers. Through the two doors, through every window, came glimpses of the soft green of the meadows; and there came also a deep sense of repose to one who had just come from a great city, and whose eyes still ached from the rattle and jolting of the train, and whose bones were stiff after a long drive. There was peace and calm even in the big, old-fashioned sofa, in the old, faded engravings in the dining-room, in the stuffed birds which built their nests inside two glass shades on the study mantelpiece. Even the clock between the glass shades, with its sharp, quavering tones, like the voice of a deaf old man, added to the general air of repose. And beneath the smiling calm of the little dwelling lay perfect purity, above suspicion, resting innocently in the warm bosom of nature, looking out on life. One traced it even in the awkward shapes of certain pieces of furniture; since, if everything spoke of peace and quiet, neither the narrow sofa nor the straight-backed horse-hair chairs promised the luxury of careless ease or of

fancy wandering at will. From the study, with its well-filled bookshelves, issued an air of austere thought; thus the aspect of the house reproduced, in some measure, that of Don Innocenzo, gay, simple, sedate. He was glad to have the Steinegges with him. They brightened his solitude and relieved the loneliness from which, at heart, he suffered. For he had a simple admiration for modern society, and loved to talk of politics, literature and the latest ideas. He had taken to Steinegge at once; while for Edith he felt, more especially after her last letter, a deep regard, mingled with a sense of inferiority. The confidences of so noble a spirit almost alarmed him. He feared that he might be unable to rise to them, be unable to grasp some feminine distinctions, to understand some subtleties of sentiment into which he must enter if he was to advise her, and to exercise the offices of religion for which she had asked. At the same time he harboured a vague suspicion that there was something excessive in Edith's asceticism, and that her tenacious attachment to it ought to be combatted. In fact, he had an attractive but serious task before him, one of those which absorbed him; making him think calmly, speak temperately, act with caution.

Before Edith and her father went up to their rooms, the priest insisted, in spite of Marta's protest, on taking them into the garden to see his rose trees, strawberries and green peas. His little kitchen garden seemed to him to be a marvel, and he was extremely proud of it. He spoke as though the green shoots from the few seeds planted in his beds, and the flowers that grew out of the green, and the fruits that grew out of the blossom, were so many miracles, all his own. And now Steinegge, also a profound botanist, scattered compliments to right and left, over the strawberries and

green peas, and defended himself, with a fresh set of compliments, from old Marta, who had come up behind him to brush his overcoat. Edith lingered behind, looking abstractedly at the somewhat chilly green of the meadows beneath the cloudy sky, and smelling the young rosebuds. Sweet innocent perfume, rising into the air like the prayer of a little child. Meanwhile Don Innocenzo was greedily drinking in Steinegge's worldly compliments, remarking—'Is it not? Tell the truth, now.' When the green peas were exhausted he took his guests to see the new treasures he had collected. First among these was 'Veuillot,' a loquacious and impertinent sparrow, who had got this nickname from a merry priest, who, annoyed by his continued chatter, had turned round on him, crying out,—'Hold your tongue, Veuillot.' 'And I rejoice to see him caged up,' added Don Innocenzo, ferociously, after telling the anecdote. He had also some new specimens of pre-historic pottery dug up in making the foundations of the new paper mill—the large, square, white building that could be seen rising up beyond the poplars along the little stream, in the middle of a scarred, burnt patch in the green grass. Don Innocenzo was still enthusiastic about the paper mill, partially perhaps owing to the discovery of his pottery. Passing through the study, Steinegge leant for an instant over a book which lay open on the escritoire in front of Don Innocenzo's arm-chair. The latter skipped across the room like a boy, caught up his book and laughingly hugged it, blushing to the roots of his hair. Steinegge, blushing too, began to apologise.

'Don't mention it, I beg. Take it, take it!' replied Don Innocenzo, pressing the book with both hands on the unwilling Steinegge.

'Ah!' said the latter, as soon as he had glanced

at it. '*Mein Gott, mein Gott!* I should never have believed it.'

It was a German grammar.

'Don't say anything. Let it be. I don't understand it!' exclaimed Don Innocenzo, still laughing; and he took back the book, threw it on to the escritoire, and placing his biretta over it, hastened away to rejoin Edith.

There was now nothing more to be seen, and the house became silent, for the Steinegges went upstairs to their rooms while Marta was laying the cloth.

The peaceful silence was only broken by the clatter of knives and forks and plates, or by an occasional heavy footstep on the rough road the other side of the garden. Edith was glad to feel that she was so far away from Milan, in the midst of quiet scenes and green meadows, as she herself had written; and as she unpacked her trunk she called out to her father, asking him whether he was happy. He came from his room, tying his cravat, his eyes bright with pleasure. He should think he *was* happy! Edith pointed out to him two rosebuds in a little glass on the chest of drawers, and Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*. Her father, too, had found flowers in his room, and Schiller's *Thirty Years' War*, in German. What a kind and cordial welcome Don Innocenzo had given them. Edith thought him somewhat aged; Steinegge thought not. And what a good creature Marta was! They exchanged their impressions in a low tone while Edith put away her things. She had brought a few German and Italian books with her, but not *A Dream*. When her father expressed regret, she did not reply; but she slipped her arm through his and drew him to the window, which looked out on the garden, the rough, winding road, the fields, the poplars beyond the

river, and, further still, the hills and a wide stretch of white clouds.

'I feel as if I were a little girl again,' said Edith; 'as if I had lost my way, and after crying bitterly had found my way home again. Don't you feel more at home here than at Milan, father?'

Somebody was talking in the garden. It was Don Innocenzo and an old peasant woman, who was crying and complaining of her daughter-in-law. The priest endeavoured to soothe her; and then the old dame began another tale, more confidential and equally sad. Don Innocenzo kept interjecting, 'Well, well!' in a satisfied tone, as though this last misfortune was more easily remedied. He hurriedly thrust some money into her hand and hastily dismissed her.

'She's a regular witch, that woman,' said Marta. 'I hope you haven't given her anything!'

'What are you thinking about!' replied Don Innocenzo.

'These roses and these German books,' said Steinegge, from his window. 'You are really too kind. We hardly know—'

'Oh! those are some old books out of the family library. Come down, come down and we will have dinner.'

The meal began merrily enough. Marta seemed to be everywhere at once. She was to wait at table, but she also ran backwards and forwards from the kitchen, in spite of the visitors' protests. Edith declared that she would allow her to have her own way on this occasion, but she must insist on taking her share of the housekeeping from to-morrow. Marta replied, 'Never, never!' Steinegge then offered his services as assistant cook, promising some *Klösse*, which he said he had taught Paolo at the castle. Poor Don

Innocenzo only knew how to make the coffee, and this he humbly proposed to do.

'By the way!' exclaimed Steinegge, waiting impatiently till the priest had finished what he was saying, 'we have not yet inquired after the Count!'

'I was at the castle two hours ago,' replied Don Innocenzo. 'He was rather better than he was yesterday evening.'

'How do you mean—rather better?'

And Steinegge leant forward anxiously.

'Ill!' exclaimed Edith, in astonishment.

'Haven't you heard?' replied the priest.

'Nothing!'

'I thought that perhaps Marta, or somebody else, would have told you. Ah! a very sad, a very melancholy state of things.'

'Dear me, you haven't heard!' said Marta, resting her hands on the table. 'Well, of course, how should you hear? It only happened two days ago.'

'But, in Heaven's name, what has happened?' said Steinegge.

'Well,' replied Don Innocenzo, 'what is to-day?—Wednesday. Well, on Monday morning, or rather on Sunday night, the Count had an apoplectic fit.'

'Oh!'

Don Innocenzo narrated, with occasional corrections from Marta, what he knew about the attack. Steinegge was terribly shocked by the sad news, and Edith also was greatly upset.

'And the bride and bridegroom?' she said.

'They are not married yet,' replied the priest.

'And they won't be married before the Day of Judgment,' added Marta.

Her master scolded her for this, remarking that the

wedding was merely postponed, and that there had been every reason for doing so. Marta went off to the kitchen, muttering to herself.

'There are other complications, too,' said Don Innocenzo, in a low tone.

Steinegge ceased to think about his dinner; and resting his elbows on the table, waited for further news.

'Later on, later on,' whispered the priest, with a sign and a glance towards the kitchen.

'Oh, I little expected this!' exclaimed Steinegge.

Edith inquired after Donna Marina. The priest said that she was well, that he had seen her the evening before.

Meanwhile, Marta had brought in the next course in silence, for she was angry at the rebuff administered to her by her master, and annoyed that this tender and well-flavoured piece of veal, with its accompanying capers, would pass unnoticed owing to the unhappy turn which the conversation had taken. She feared a similar fate would befall the roast fowl.

'After dinner we will walk up to the castle, won't we, father?' said Edith.

'Of course.'

Veuillot alone had not lost his merry loquaciousness. He chirped away so vigorously that he forced the party at the table to listen to him, and to talk about him, and his unjust nickname. The setting sun lit up the ceiling of the room. Don Innocenzo began to talk about his precious pottery, and of the learned antiquaries who were coming to see it.

Edith offered a few critical remarks which scandalised her father. He had every confidence in the pottery and the antiquaries, and began to talk about the Swiss lake-dwellings, which he knew something of. Suddenly he

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stopped short, remembering that they ought to be starting for the castle.

'Wait,' said Don Innocenzo, 'wait for the coffee.'

'I think we ought to have it in the garden; don't you?'

They went out into the garden, where the air was fresh and sweet. The sun had burst through the clouds and was lighting up the hills in the west; the little house was aglow, the windows were flashing in the light. Edith said she would bring the coffee. Steinegge and Don Innocenzo sat down to wait for her on the low wall surrounding the garden, opposite the dining-room.

'Marta is a good soul,' remarked Don Innocenzo, 'but a great chatterbox. There are complications at the castle. That young man Silla has just turned up again.'

Steinegge nearly jumped off his seat.

'Excuse me, but it's hardly possible! Why, I saw him only the other day at Milan, in my own house, and he didn't say a word about this.'

'So it is, however.'

'You have seen him?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, but really—forgive me, but I almost think your eyes have deceived you! Oh, it's not possible. He here, at the castle?'

He got up and walked hastily up and down, along the wall, muttering to himself in German.

He stood still, an idea had flashed across him.

'Perhaps he was recalled?' he said. 'By telegram, perhaps.'

'It may be so, but I can't believe it, for I have told you in what state the Count is. The Marchesina could not bear the man when he was last here, and the Salvadors do not know him.'

'And what is he doing here?'

'Well, well, you know the common report about him? There is little doubt that his arrival at the present moment is a thorn in the side of the young Marchioness and of the Salvadors.'

'The Count's money? Oh, that is a falsehood, a calumny!' said Steinegge, excitedly. 'Pardon me, you do not know all I do. Do not believe it. The story about Signor Silla is absolutely false, and I could swear that he has not come here from any such low motive.'

Don Innocenzo gave him a sign to say no more. At the kitchen door Marta was disputing Edith's possession of the coffee-pot and cups.

'No, no,' she was saying. 'These things are not fit for you to do. Well, well, do as you will, there!'

Edith came along with short steps, giving her whole mind to her task, keeping her eyes fixed on the cups with their red-and-green pattern, on the sugar-bowl, and on the coffee-pot, which threatened to tumble over. The rich glow of the setting sun streamed over her face, over the tray she carried, over her delicate hands.

'Don't you know?' asked her father, impetuously, in German, 'that Signor Silla is here?'

She stood still and remained silent for a moment, without giving any other sign of surprise. Then she asked quietly,—

'Where? Here?'

'At the castle.'

She put down the tray on the wall, and asked Don Innocenzo whether he took his coffee with sugar or without.

Her father was amazed at her indifference. Perhaps she had information of her own? Perhaps Silla had given her a hint the other day?

No, Silla had told her nothing, and she knew nothing. She observed that Signor Silla might have been summoned by a telegram.

'No, my young lady, for that gentleman they never set the telegraph wires going,' said Marta, behind her, bringing a teaspoon for the sugar. Don Innocenzo, intent on his coffee and the conversation, had not noticed her approach.

'What do you know about it?' he said.

'Why is poor me to know nothing?' replied the petulant Marta. 'That gentleman seems to have fallen from the clouds. Nobody expected him. The only person who is glad is Giovanna, because she knew the Count was fond of him. The others can't bear him, especially Signora Donna Marina. My master, of course, won't tell me anything; but he knows quite well that yesterday evening her ladyship made this Signor Silla step out into the garden, and gave him a piece of her mind.'

'How do you know these things?' asked the astonished Don Innocenzo.

'Oh, I hear this and that. It's true, isn't it?'

'It is true that she asked him to go into the garden, but what she said to him neither you nor I know.'

'No, of course, nobody heard what was said; but those who ought to know say that she told him to go away, because it was she who made him go away the last time.'

'But he has not gone?' said Edith.

'No, no, he has not gone; at least, I think not.'

'Have you seen him to-day, reverend sir?'

'Yes, I met him on the stairs.'

'Shall we be going, Edith?' asked Steinegge.

'Well, no, father. I think the moment is hardly a suitable one for me to call there. Do you go, and I will stay with Don Innocenzo.'

'This is the eve of the 1st of May,' remarked the latter.

'Very well, I will come to church.'

Steinegge did not like going alone, but he gave way and went. Marta went back to the house with the cups and saucers, leaving the priest and Edith sitting on the low wall.

'He is a good man,' she exclaimed passionately. 'He is a good man, far better than I am. And he is so fond of you. He was most anxious to come here. It is a most fortunate thing that he should be so attached to you, in spite of your cloth. Only yesterday evening we were talking about religion. I was saying that some spirits naturally act as mediators between mankind and God, whatever course their life on earth may take, that you, for example, even if your reverence were not a priest—'

'Oh, my dear young lady.'

'Yes, yes, you are such an one. I am glad to believe it, and to say it. If you only knew what need we have of you. My father said he believed that what I have just said is true.'

Her emotion was as strong as it had been sudden.

'Set your mind at rest,' said Don Innocenzo. 'Perhaps your father is nearer to God than many who serve in His ministry, than myself, for instance, who have ever lived a placid life, free from care, without any real trials, performing no good works, with frequent lapses of zeal. And this although, each day of my life, I approach the mysteries of God, although I live, one may say, in the warmth of so many noble souls which have loved Him, I am practically worthless. But there is an element of truth in what you have said. It is that an unselfish in-

terest, even in an unworthy person, even in so-called inanimate nature, elevates the mind. It gives the mind a wider outlook; it may even see the goal towards which it is travelling; not the way thither, but it will see the goal. Your worthy father is fond of me, I know not why. There is no tie of blood, or force of habit, or common interest. We have not even that community of ideas which is the usual basis of friendship, though it often—do not you think so—introduces a shade of egotism. His affection for a poor, worthless creature like myself removes his thoughts from that angry resentment which, in my opinion, is the most serious obstacle to his return to the Church and to God. As long as he finds pleasure in my company, I am sure that, though from no merit of mine, a certain measure of peace fills his heart; and if he does think of what he has endured in the past, it will strike him as farther off than it was. He will go on working. We shall attain our end, you will see. At the same time, you were very wise not to insist, not to press him too much, and not to annoy him with excess of zeal.'

'Poor father!' said Edith, with a sigh. She pictured him with his good, honest face, saw him happy and contented, far from suspecting the melancholy secrets hidden in the heart of his child.

'Has he ever spoken to you of religious observances?' asked Don Innocenzo.

'Never directly,' replied Edith, quietly. 'How can he? Confession, for example. He holds it in detestation. When I go to church he always accompanies me. Recently I have been twice to confession. I go there rarely now.'

'I cannot blame you!' said Don Innocenzo.

'He did not mention the subject, either the first or the second time,' Edith continued, 'but he was distressed I could see that, and for some time afterwards he was in low spirits and said little. I can read his thoughts. Poor father! You cannot imagine the bad companions he has had. They have not spoilt his kind disposition, but they have filled his mind with so many wretched cynical ideas.'

The sacristan came into the garden, and asked for the keys of the church. Don Innocenzo took leave of Edith, who remained seated on the little wall. As soon as she was alone, she felt herself seized with a profound sense of melancholy. She had loved, and had sacrificed her love, but only then did she feel that she had lost Silla for ever, only then when she heard that he had returned to the castle, to Marina. A few minutes later, from the church still warm with the rays of the setting sun, the bells rang out. To Edith they seemed to say, 'Farewell, love, farewell, sweet love; farewell, youth and happiness.' She rose and went indoors; but even there the sound of the bells, although more faintly, entered. 'Farewell, farewell.' Edith went upstairs to her room. The window was open, and the bells repeated, more loudly than ever, 'Farewell.' Between the white curtains could be seen, in the west, the evening star. Edith did not wish to get sentimental; she went to her father's room, and then felt more at ease. She closed the window without knowing why. Then she began to brush one of his coats, carefully examining all the buttons; then she folded up the coat and laid it down on a chair. She arranged the pillows on his bed, and smoothed and turned down the sheets with the tender care of a mother making up a bed for an invalid child. Then she stood and looked

at the bright star, peacefully this time, and heard Marta calling to her from the garden.

Marta wished to know whether she was going to church, because, if so, they could go together.

They joined the small throng of women who were walking up from the village, their heads covered by large, dark handkerchiefs, and who entered the quiet church one after the other, dipped the right hand in the holy water, and making a reverence to the high altar, disappeared to the right and left among the darkness of the pews. Don Innocenzo soon appeared in surplice and stole, and read the prayers to the Virgin, interspersing a good many *paters* and *aves*.

Edith would have liked to follow the prayers from her heart, and could not do so; they were so pompous, and so false, and so insipid. She was astonished that Don Innocenzo could find nothing more worthy of the pure spirit of the Virgin, the Christian personification of *das ewig Weibliche*. Don Innocenzo had indeed endeavoured, in time past, to introduce some prayers of his own, much more simple and severe; but their old prayers, which had been in use for generations, were more popular with the people. The bigots, male and female, of the village, made such a religious war, persecuted the poor curate so till he restored the thrones, the royal mantles, the crown of stars, that he was obliged to give way.

Edith did not feel, when service was over, as if she was going away with thoughts of church and of devotions. She was once more at the Horror; she heard Marina ask her about Silla, speak of her cousin and of his matrimonial schemes; heard her say, 'If in the future you hear people speak about me, say things against me, remember this evening.' Then she was walking along the fortifications at Milan with Silla; heard him speak of Marina, read the

dedication of *A Dream:* 'If he is repelled by her, he will let himself fall never to rise again.' A new light explained everything. She roused herself from her retrospect, and bending over a chair, with closed eyes, she abandoned herself in heartfelt prayer to God.

But she could not continue. Her first thoughts again took possession of her and carried her away; they had only yielded temporarily to her effort of will. During this inward struggle she ceased to hear the voice of Don Innocenzo, and the solemn murmur of the responses in the dark church; she did not hear the chanting of the litany which issued softly through the open door and mingled with whispers of the evening breeze. A hand was laid on her shoulder; it was her father's.

'I have just come back,' he whispered. 'Would you like me to stay with you for a little?'

'Oh, yes, father. Sit down, you must be tired.'

She sat down herself and took one of his hands in hers.

Steinegge was silent for a moment, then he said timidly,—

'Is service over?'

'Yes, father.'

'Cannot we say a prayer together?'

She pressed his hand.

'Say something,' he said.

'Let us think of mother,' replied Edith. 'May she ask God to bestow His grace and His peace upon us always. As we forgive those who have trespassed against us. Do we not, father? All of them?'

Steinegge did not reply; his hand trembled.

'Say yes, father. We are so happy.'

'Oh, Edith, let us say only those who have injured me.'

'All, father, all of them.'

'I will do what I can,' he said.

The church was empty. The sacristan had already locked the side door and Don Innocenzo was walking towards the main entrance. The Steinegges rose and went out with him. Edith stopped for an instant in the porch.

'How beautiful it is!' she said.

The sky was clear, broken only by the sharp outlines of the mountains and of the hills away in the west, where the bright evening star was setting. There was a fresh breeze. Behind the church, on the mountain, could be heard the rustling of the trees. The valley looked like a large, dark cloth clumsily laid out at the feet of the shining stars.

'A pity that there is no moon,' remarked Steinegge.

Edith replied that she sometimes liked the colder starlight better than the moon. Her idea was that the moon, our small satellite, which was at one time perhaps joined to our planet, encourages some earthly passions and softens men's hearts; whereas the stars, in their austere indifference, exalt our minds. Such was her idea, but she did not say so. She only remarked to Don Innocenzo that, this evening, Venus's light was strong enough to cast shadows on the white walls of the church.

'She is like the moon,' she added, 'very soft, but I think more spiritual.'

She regarded everything, in her present mood, from the religious point of view, even the wind behind the church.

'What news from the castle?' asked Don Innocenzo, who had to visit a sick girl.

'A little better, he seems a little better; the danger to the lungs seems to have passed away.'

'Oh, Edith, what a house, what a house!' exclaimed Steinegge, after Don Innocenzo had gone away. 'Oh!'

He took three big strides forward, gesticulating with his hands.

Edith said nothing on the way back.

'I thought you were never coming,' said Marta, opening the door. 'How is he?'

'A little better. Shall we take another little turn, Edith?'

She assented. Instead of taking the direct road to the village, they followed the rough track which follows the garden wall, and then takes a slanting line till it joins the high road, a few hundred yards from the village.

Steinegge gave an account of his visit to the castle, where he had seen Countess Fosca and Giovanna. The former, instead of wishing him good evening, had exclaimed, 'Well, if there isn't that other man back now! But on hearing that he was the guest of the curate she had become very cordial. Steinegge had not understood one-third of what she said about the melancholy event, or of her lamentations over the utter confusion that reigned at the castle. Marina, according to the Countess, was inconsolable, and hardly ever left her apartments. About the wedding she did not say a word, but Giovanna had made up for her silence. The latter, poor woman, wan and tearful, had aroused his pity. Her one thought was the Count, and what impressions his illness would leave on his mind if he recovered. Giovanna would have liked the wedding to take place at once, and that everybody should leave the castle. According to her, the Countess and Count Nepo aimed simply at getting the Count's money. They had already inquired whether he had made a will.

'But there is one thing which distresses me even more than all this,' added Steinegge; 'I have seen Silla.'

Edith said nothing.

'Oh, it seemed curious to see him there. He appeared surprised, too, but he avoided me; hardly said good evening, and did not even ask after you.'

'There was no necessity for him to ask after me.'

'But we were old friends! It would have only been natural. I am afraid I know too much, Edith. I fear —you will understand what it is I fear. On the other hand, that evening at Milan, he seemed to have quite got over it when he spoke of the wedding. Is that not so? I think I mentioned it before?'

'Yes, yes, I know, father. Where are we walking to? I don't like this road.'

They had come out on to the high road. It was very dark. Venus had disappeared; from the bottom of the valley the wind carried towards them the faint croaking of frogs, the dank scent of wet meadows.

'Let us turn to the left,' said Steinegge, 'and go back through the village and past the church.'

They slowly approached the village, arm-in-arm. Edith was talking about her beloved Germany and her past life there. She was ever recalling some fresh memory of her girlhood, more especially at such times as this. Her father was always affected by her recollections, and still more so by the thought that the unhappy years were over, and that she was by his side.

In the village they met Don Innocenzo, who was just coming out of a poor cottage. They heard a woman, who was showing him the path with a lantern, say to him in piteous tones,—

'Is it really true, your reverence?'

'Take courage, Maria,' replied Don Innocenzo, 'she returns to the Lord who gave her.'

The woman laid her head against the wall and wept.

'You had better go indoors, Maria,' said Don Innocenzo, softly.

The woman continued to cry, and did not stir.

'Take comfort,' said Edith; 'we will pray for you.'

She turned at the sound of the strange voice, and replied, as though she already knew Edith,—

'Come indoors with me, come and see how beautiful she is.'

Don Innocenzo objected to this at first, but Edith wished to please the poor woman and went with her to see the sick child. In the kitchen two little girls were playing together, seated on the floor. Their father, bending over the fire, was warming up a cup of coffee; he did not turn round to welcome, or even to look at, the stranger, but said roughly to his wife,—

'Am I to take it to her?'

'Oh, gracious Lord!' cried the wretched woman. In a broken voice her husband uttered a few angry words, and sat down gloomily before the fire.

The sick girl was a fair, delicate little creature, about twelve years old, who was peacefully passing away, while believing that she was getting better.

A few minutes later Edith rejoined her father and Don Innocenzo, who were waiting for her in the road.

'It should make us ashamed,' she said, 'of all our little petty sorrows.'

Neither of the three said a word on their way back. Steinegge, feeling tired, went to bed, and Don Innocenzo retired to his study to read evening prayers. Edith went to the kitchen to have a consultation with Marta on such vital questions of domestic economy as

the prices of sugar and coffee, the best methods of cooking tomatoes and pickling capers, and which was the best and cheapest canvas. After half an hour's *tête-à-tête*, Edith left the kitchen and knocked gently at the study door.

Don Innocenzo did not expect her visit; he asked her, smiling, whether anything had happened. She replied,—

'No; I only wished to speak to you.'

The priest saw at a glance that the subject was serious, and assumed a serious air.

'Pray be seated,' he said, half rising and pointing to a chair. Then he waited in silence.

Some minutes passed before she began to speak. Don Innocenzo began to look attentively at his escritoire, and to remove with his little finger, and lightly blow away, an imaginary speck of dust.

At last, without any preamble, she narrated what her father had told her about Silla's passion for Marina, prior to his flight from the castle; and mentioned Marina's strange bearing and strange talk on the way back from the Horror, and of her own consternation at hearing, that same evening, of Marina's engagement to Salvador. In a somewhat shaky voice she went on to speak of her walk with Silla, and his ostentation of indifference at the approaching marriage. She added, after overcoming an inward repugnance to mention the subject, that her suspicion as to Silla's feelings towards herself had been confirmed. He had not declared himself in so many words, but by his general bearing; and she feared that she had indirectly encouraged him. Hiding her face in her hands, she added that she deeply regretted her conduct, and was now being punished for it.

'Dear me,' said Don Innocenzo, in great embarrassment. 'Dear me . . . I hardly know—'

Then came an account of Silla's visit next day, her cold reception of him, and the words written in his book. Here Don Innocenzo started, guessing, too late, the inference to be drawn from Edith's story. She mentioned her father's recent meeting with Silla, and the impression it had made on him. She feared that there was some sad mystery at the castle, and reproached herself with having encouraged, through lack of vigilance, a suit, the rejection of which had, perhaps, driven Silla to dishonourable courses.

'I have felt,' she added, 'that I ought to tell you all this, because it may be well for you to know how things stand when you go to the castle, however much I may personally be to blame.'

Don Innocenzo gently rubbed his hands, pursing up his lips as though they pained him.

'I do not really see,' he said, 'what blame can attach—'

And yet a certain chill had fallen upon him. He kept repeating vague phrases to himself, like one who does not clearly see his way. He asked Edith what kind of man Silla was. She said that he had a noble stature, which had been warped by the disappointments of his life.

'And you think that he was attached to you?'

Edith did not reply.

'But you, on your side, did not return his feeling, and it was only by a misapprehension that Signor Silla cherished the hopes he did?'

'No, I fear not; not by a misapprehension.' She uttered these words almost in a whisper, and hid her face in her hands upon the writing-table.

Don Innocenzo gazed silently at the fair young hair with its golden gleam. This discovery pained him He was pained to discover passion where he had imagined there was only peace; he was pained to see the beautiful head bowed in grief. In bygone years, during the long evenings which he used to pass reading and meditating in his little room, other pictures of modest, pensive women had risen before his eyes, from the saintly books. The hoarse tick of the clock seemed to say to him, 'Do you remember?' And now, after many years, his imagination had found living embodiment in the figure before him, which was no more dangerous for him than for an innocent child. He was grieved to see her wounded, because there was in her something of his own spotless boyhood, something of the high ideals of womanhood which he had then reverently contemplated.

Edith raised her face and covered it with her hands.

'I fear,' she said, 'that I did not do all I might have done to conceal my true feelings.'

'But if this young man is a fine character, and was fond of you, and if you yourself, pardon me, if, in your words, you yourself— But, then, why did it end thus?'

Her hands fell from her face, and two bright eyes wet with tears met the priest's.

'Oh, how could you think of that, you who know all? How could I have done that while my father has such need of me? To place another duty, perhaps a stronger duty, alongside my duty as his child! Is that what I came to Italy for? That is not the life I am called to, I am convinced of that.'

'Are you really convinced?' said Don Innocenzo, gravely. 'Do you understand how great a sacrifice you propose to make?'

'No,' said Edith, clasping her hands, 'don't say that, don't say that! What I do is nothing in comparison to what I owe my father. Thus may God grant that he will return to the faith! Meanwhile, I am glad that he suspects nothing; as for me, I can forget. You must help me!'

Poor old priest, to help to combat love! In the goodness and ingenuousness of his heart Edith's sacrifice appeared to him unreasonable. If this man was a fine character, if he loved her, surely he would also love, with filial affection, her father, and would assist in the holy work which Edith had set before her.

'Is it necessary?' he said. 'Is it really useful, this sacrifice of yours? Let us consider well. It may be that your father desires to see you settled in life, that this thought causes him secret anxieties. Another point, Do you know how many means exist of bringing back a soul to the faith? Perhaps within the limits of one Christian family there are more than you are able to imagine. I speak of the future. As to what is past you may set your mind at rest. If any disaster should occur, no blame can fall upon you. No, none whatever, believe me. Even assuming that you have shown signs of —of—sympathy with this gentleman, you will still never be responsible before God for dishonourable acts of his.'

'No,' she said, 'yet it would be a great grief to me.'

Don Innocenzo was silent, he was seeking for words which would not come. Again other thoughts, suggested by Edith's narrative, troubled him considerably; the suspicion of a sinister plot, a doubt whether he ought not to take some action, perhaps speedily, to combat the designs attributed by Edith to Marina, of which Marina herself gave a hint when she spoke of a friend of hers,

who had married out of pique so as to reach her lover through her husband.

'Speak to me quite frankly,' he said suddenly; 'are you convinced, or not, that there is an understanding between Signor Silla and Donna Marina? Have no scruples; this is not a question of scandal or of judging others, as condemned by the Gospel. My office might be usefully called into play, and I ought to know, as far as possible, the truth. You, who know the persons and the facts, tell me frankly what is the understanding.'

'Two days ago they had no definite one,' replied Edith, 'but now I fear they have.'

'What do you mean? They have agreed on something?'

'I fear that they will; I have that presentiment.'

'You fear that they will,' said Don Innocenzo, talking to himself, and leaning one elbow on the escritoire, with the palm of his hand against his forehead, and the fingers tapping restlessly on the top of his head. After reflecting for some time he opened a drawer and took out some writing-paper.

'You have never replied,' he said, 'to the words which Signor Silla wrote on that book for you.'

'No, reverend father.'

'Eh?' asked Don Innocenzo. Perhaps she had had a presentiment of what the curate was about to suggest, in so low a tone did she speak.

'No, I have not replied.'

The priest rose to his feet.

'Well, reply now,' he said.

Edith involuntarily got up too; she understood, without more explanation, Don Innocenzo's idea.

'Quick,' said the latter, drawing the inkstand near to the paper which he had placed on the escritoire.

Edith clasped her hands.

'Do you think that it is my duty? And at once?'

'Yes, I do. My duty will be to judge if, and how, the letter is to be handed over. Take my chair.' Edith sat down in silence, took up the pen firmly and looked at the curate.

His eyes, beneath the lofty forehead, assumed a solemn expression.

'I do not know much about those things,' he said in an agitated tone, 'but I have always had the idea that instead of a bond of passion, sanctified or not, there might be, between two truly strong and noble natures, another bond, one of affection holy in itself; a love, to use that great word, in perfect conformity with the Christian ideal of the close union of all human souls in their journey towards God. I may observe that there is on earth nothing more lovely than such a union, although the conjugal union is sacred and has a deep significance. You wish to make this sacrifice for your father's sake; be it so; but why root out from your heart even the memory of him you loved? Why renounce a life-giving sentiment which leads you to desire the temporal and eternal welfare of this person as much as your own? Why should not he entertain a similar feeling towards you, so that both, in the knowledge of this mutual feeling, may pursue your different paths in life, and fulfil your respective duties, fortified by the great secret buried in your hearts? Write accordingly, write accordingly.'

'You are a saint,' said Edith. But on her face and in her voice there was a melancholy *but*. 'I fully realise,' she added, 'the beauty of such a union, but would it satisfy him? Would he not press his wishes upon me all the more strongly? would he not make me venture on some painful step?'

Don Innocenzo felt mortified. He felt that his knowledge of the world was so much smaller than hers that he was not able to continue the discussion; yet he remained convinced of the correctness of his views.

'Be it so,' he said with a sigh; 'write as you will, if only a few words to cheer him up.'

She said nothing, and began to reflect, sitting with the pen in her hand looking at the moon. The curate opened the window and rested his arms on the window-sill. The stars looked down on him and said he was right, but the dark earth said that he was wrong.

After a few minutes Edith called to him, and held out, open, the letter which she had written.

'No,' he said, 'I will not read it; only let me know whether they are words which will appeal to him.'

'Oh, Don Innocenzo,' exclaimed Edith, in pleading tones, 'I have written, I have done as you desired. Read it if you will, but do not ask me any more questions, do not pursue the subject further.'

'Come, come, be of good courage, remember that our Saviour tells us not to abandon ourselves to despair; and go and take some rest, for it is late.'

Before going to her own room, Edith listened at her father's door, which stood ajar. He was asleep. For her there could be no pleasanter, no more pathetic sound than that of his quiet breathing, peaceful as a child's. She put her candle in her own room, and turned back again, resting her forehead against the woodwork of his door, listening, seeking for peace and strength, of which she was in need.

At that moment the passing hours fell one by one in heavy strokes from the bell-tower, striking with their deep solemn sound on the roof, on the stairs, along the

echoing floors of the sleeping house. Edith raised her head and counted them timidly, as though they were blows dealt upon an iron gate by some formidable and unexpected visitor.

It was half-past ten.

CHAPTER IV

A FORMIDABLE VISITOR

SILLA, who was lying stretched out on the grass, suddenly sat up and counted the hours. Half-past ten. He knew that it must be half-past ten; he had looked at his watch two minutes before, for the hundredth time. He plucked convulsively at the grass and pulled out two handfuls. Marina had said: after eleven o'clock. He let his arms fall listlessly, bowed his neck, and fell together as though some enormous foot were trampling on his shoulders. At that moment he reflected, in a dull, cold, sluggish way, on the act of disloyalty which he contemplated beneath the roof of a friend lying dangerously ill; he thought of past resolves, of the alternation of defeats and victories, and above all, of his old sinister presentiment of one final, hopeless fall, of a horrible abyss waiting for him, he knew not at what turning-point of his life, in which he would lose himself, body and soul, for ever. He felt, without alarm, that he had reached the spot and had one foot over the yawning void.

A fierce energy coursed through his veins, all thought was blotted out from his mind, except the thought that the hour was rapidly approaching.

He had been there for an hour, at the same place as on the evening before, on the grass of the vineyard, close to a cypress. Those five endless hours after dinner,

which seemed as though they would never pass, had come to an end, vanished like a moment. He looked at his watch; it wanted twenty-five minutes to eleven.

Should he go to meet her? Should he wait there? He felt irritated that his blood did not burn with fiercer desire. His brain and nerves were tortured by the feverishness of waiting; that was all. Possibly the meeting with Steinegge—? No, he did not care to think of him.

He rose and put his arm round the thick stem of the cypress, and, shutting his eyes, pretended to listen; he revelled, over and over again, in the whisper which, in his imagination, slowly travelled towards him, and felt a perfumed breath, and two little hands which clasped his and drew him upwards into the darkness. She went whirling up the steps and he followed her, neither saying a word, but their clasped hands spoke a language so inexpressibly sweet and clear that the lovers breathed fast in the rapture of their madness; and—

He gave the cypress a violent push and sprang on one side. He looked at his watch; it was a quarter to eleven. Leaving the vineyard he stepped on to the flight of steps which he slowly descended on tip-toe, holding his breath, standing still at every sound which mingled with the murmur of the fountains. Having reached the court he halted for a moment. No light, no sound issued from the gloomy castle. Turning to the right, close under the wall, beneath the waving tendrils of the passion flowers and jessamine, he pushed open the door of the boat-house and stepped into the darkness. All that could be seen was, on the left, the bottom of the flight of steps and, in the body of the boat-house, the dim undulations of the water which every now and then lapped quietly against the boats. Then it

suddenly flashed across Silla that perhaps that *rendezvous* might turn out differently from what he had imagined, that perhaps Marina did not care for him, that it was only one of her strange caprices. Did she wish to make a laughing-stock of him and leave him there all night?

He sat down on the stone steps, and looking through the round window high up in the wall saw a patch of sky, the top of a cypress, and one pale star.

It wanted seven minutes to eleven. His watch was two minutes fast by the church clock. By the latter it must be nine minutes to eleven. He reflected that when it was eleven o'clock by his watch he would still have two minutes to wait, two endless, miserable minutes. Just then above his head, in the depths of the castle, from some big clock faster than the others, he heard the deep clang of the hours striking. For Donna Marina it was eleven o'clock. He rose and went up the steps until he was out of the light which fell from the little round window. Resting his hands on the walls on each side of the steps he leant forward and listened.

Silence.

The slight creak of an opened door made him hold his breath. Then followed the muffled sound of cautious steps, and he heard a voice—no, not a voice, a rapid whisper—

'Renato!'

Silla sprang forwards, but his foot slipped. A minute afterwards he heard himself called again, in a louder tone,—

'Renato!'

The voice sounded and yet did not sound like that of Donna Marina. He stepped back. Then he heard the rustle of a dress rapidly descending the steps, then all was still again.

'Silla! Silla!' said Donna Marina.

It was she; he could not see her, but he felt that she was standing opposite to him, a few steps off.

'I am not Renato,' he said, without moving. 'Ah, you don't remember the name? Give me your hand!'

She moved rapidly towards him and almost fell into Silla's arms; he pressed her to him, nearly lifting her from the ground.

'Was it true?' she said, in a faint voice, her lips touching his neck. 'Was what you said to me last night true?'

Silla did not reply. He pressed her more closely to him, and as he kissed her shoulder felt his cheek pressed against another cheek as soft as velvet, and a warm little ear.

'Was it true?' repeated Marina, tenderly.

It was impossible for him to hold that haughty beauty in his arms, with her heart beating against his, to breathe the perfume of her dress, and to hear the faint voice at his ear, and not lose all self-possession. Silla with difficulty whispered,—

'And you love me?'

'God! since how long ago!' replied Marina.

Then, as if by a sudden inspiration, she suddenly released herself from Silla's embrace, and laid her hands on his shoulders.

'So you do not remember all?' she said.

He did not understand, and replied at hazard, wildly, holding out his arms.

'All—everything!'

'Even Genoa?'

The strange words passed unnoticed by Silla, who repeated impatiently,—

'Everything—everything!'

Marina seized hold of his hands and forcibly joined them together.

'Give thanks to God!' she said.

This time the dread name seemed to go through him like cold steel. He remained stupefied, with joined hands. Marina also remained silent for a few minutes, believing that he was silently praying, then she slipped her right hand under his arm, and whispered, 'Now, let us be going,' and turned to ascend the flight of steps.

He followed her slowly, mechanically, keeping one step behind her.

They came to a landing where the steps turned to the right.

'Come,' said Marina, letting go his arm and putting her own round his waist. Then she placed her lips against his ear and whispered into it.

Forgetting her recent unintelligible utterances, he turned blindly towards her, and replied.

'Quietly,' she said, placing her left hand on his lips.

Pushing open a door, she entered a passage, holding Silla's hand in hers, and led the way, walking cautiously, close to the wall. Suddenly she stood still to listen, believing she heard footsteps and voices. The voices came from the floor below; from the passage near the Count's room.

She took no further notice of it and went on. He heard her hand touch a door handle and turn it. A flood of light streamed into the passage; a perfume of roses surrounded Silla. They went in.

It was the room of the old-fashioned escritoire. Lighted candles stood on the top of the escritoire, on the piano, on a low bookcase. Through the open door of the bedroom came a feeble gleam of light. Large

bunches of bluebells and of white and yellow roses were scattered about the room.

Marina stepped quickly into the light, drew Silla after her, shut the door and turned the key all in an instant. Her eyes were sparkling with laughter; her neck and wrists flashed with gold; her dress was gleaming white.

Leaving Silla, she sprang towards the piano, and before he could get her away from it, began to play, with demoniacal fire, the *siciliana* in '*Roberto il Diavolo.*'

'I defy them!' she said, allowing herself to be led away. 'I defied them frankly yesterday evening, didn't I? and they didn't understand.'

Silla was expecting that somebody, on hearing the piano, would come up.

Marina shrugged her shoulders and, releasing her hand from his, threw herself into a big arm-chair.

'Here,' she said, motioning to him to sit on the floor beside her. 'And now, all your reminiscences?'

Silla did not answer.

'The ball first of all,' began Marina. 'Don't you understand? The Doria ball!' and she stamped impatiently.

'I do not understand,' he said.

Marina at once rose from her seat.

'Did you not tell me that you remembered?'

There was within him an evil spirit that was irritated by these frivolous questions. He did not care whether he understood them or not. Taking her hands in his ice-cold hands, he forced her back into her chair and leant over her as he replied,—

'I know nothing; I remember nothing. I have never had any existence other than the present one. All that I knew was that this moment would come. I am minded to enjoy it.'

He experienced the giddy sensation of descending

into a great bottomless abyss, and he longed eagerly to go headlong to lower depths, to rise no more.

'Don't hold my hands,' said Marina, endeavouring to release them. 'I will not have it,' she exclaimed, as he took no notice. So haughty was her utterance and her glance that Silla obeyed. Rising to her feet, she slowly walked away from him, with head bowed. Suddenly she turned round and stamped on the floor.

'Think! Just think!' she said.

A shudder ran through Silla and chilled him to the bone. A vague, terrible presentiment came over him. Marina, speaking rapidly, said,—

'Why did you call me Cecilia that evening?'

'Because I had discovered that you were the Cecilia of the letters.

She reflected for a moment, and then said calmly,—

'That is just what I thought. But yesterday evening,' and she continued with her former impetuosity, 'and only a few minutes ago, why did you tell me you remembered everything?'

'Because I believed you were talking about our correspondence, and the moment when I held you in my arms down there near the boat-house.'

She sat down at the escritoire and got out the manuscript, and after burying herself for a few minutes in the perusal of the old faded papers, she suddenly rose to her feet.

'I will tell you a secret which concerns you also,' she said, and put out first the two candles on the escritoire, and then those on the bookcase, quietly and without saying a word, as though the lights were alive and could hear. Only through the open door of the bedroom came a feeble glimmer, which fell on the floor and on the nearest pieces of furniture.

Marina caught hold of Silla's arm, and leading him into the darkest corner of the room, near the passage door, whispered to him,—

'You do not know who I am.'

He did not answer, for he did not understand; that vague presentiment came over him again, and filled him with dread.

'Do you remember that evening in the loggia, the lady whom you accused, about whom I was angry?'

Silla still remained silent.

'Don't you remember the Countess Varrega d'Ormengo?'

'Yes,' he said, suddenly pretending to remember, and anxiously waiting for Marina to explain herself.

But she only laid her head on his shoulder and sobbed bitterly, murmuring three words which Silla did not catch. He turned his head, and touching her hair with his lips, begged her to say them again.

'I am she,' she said, still sobbing. An involuntary movement, a smothered cry of pain, made her start. She stepped back and exclaimed,—

'So you think that I am—'

'Oh, no!' interposed Silla.

The word, not uttered only guessed, seemed to ring through the room.

'What low creatures you all are!'

The time had been when no one could have called Corrado Silla low, but that time had passed, and he felt the fact acutely.

'You wrote to me,' continued Marina, 'that you believed in a previous existence. What sort of belief was yours? It was a fantasy, not a belief. I tell you, it is the truth, and you are frightened and think me mad? Who told you, mean-spirited cur, to play the great man? Go!'

One after another the insolent words cut him like a whip, overwhelmed him with their vehement logic, irritated him and filled him with a growing desire to hear and know more. He plied her with eager questions, and gradually passed from entreaty to disdain. She repulsed him with the one hard monosyllable.

'Go! Go!'

At length, however, she gave way.

'Listen to me,' she said. 'Let us walk about.'

They walked slowly round the room, now passing into the light that came from the bedroom, now disappearing in the darkness. Marina was talking fast and in so low a tone that, to catch what she said, Silla had to bend his ear down to her lips.

On his face, the first few times that they passed into the light, there was a look of feverish curiosity; but after that his eyes stared stonily. Marina talked with one clenched hand pressed against her brow. All of a sudden, in the dark part of the room, they stood still. 'But what do you mean?' he asked. Marina did not answer. A minute later they heard the click of a spring. In a low tone he put another question. Marina went to her room, and returned with a lighted candle, which she placed on the escritoire. She also was deadly pale, and her eyes had an expression of indescribable melancholy. Silla greedily seized the manuscript. Marina, watching him fixedly, followed the sinister tale on his silent lips, his knitted eyebrows, his trembling hands. During that deathlike silence hurried footsteps were heard more than once in the passage below, but neither Silla nor Marina noticed them. From time to time Silla gave a shudder, and read out a few words aloud, and she would then place her forefinger on the manuscript, bending over it, breathing heavily.

'Do you remember this?' he once asked her, reading on.

'All—everything,' she replied. 'Read here—read loud.'

Silla read: 'They said that I should be born anew; that I should live again, here, between these walls; that here I should be avenged; that here I should love Renato, and be loved by him; they said something else dark, incomprehensible, illegible; perhaps the name which he will then bear.'

'And you do not remember?' she said, mournfully.

He did not hear her. He was under the spell of the weird manuscript, and continued to read in silence. One passage made him shudder, and he read it out loud.

'Oh! that at that moment I could rise from my bier and speak.'

'And I have spoken,' said Marina. 'The other night, as though I had only just left my coffin, I killed him.'

Silla did not heed her. He went on reading. As he got to the words: 'When, in the second life—' Marina snatched the manuscript out of his hand, and taking his head tightly between her hands, pressed it backwards.

'And you did not believe,' she said. 'But I have forgiven you because I love you, because God, I feel, so wills it; and because, besides, at first I did not believe myself. This is where I knelt down. Like this.'

She fell on her knees, and rested her arms and her head on the escritoire.

'I thought, and thought, and searched my memory. Nothing. Then faith came to me like a lightning flash, and I believed.' She rose to her feet and laid a hand

Milan, another of the quiet canals at Venice, another of money, another of good dinners, another of Nina with the snow-white arms. Every gate and every door had opened before this visitor, with the silent, terrified obeisance of servants surprised by the unexpected return of their lord. He had gone upstairs till he reached the bedroom of the Count, whispering to the walls, as he glided along them, his dread name—

DEATH.

'Marchesina! Marchesina!' exclaimed Fanny, as she entered the room. She saw Silla, and was thunderstruck. Silla disengaged himself, and stepped back. Marina, taken by surprise for the moment, quickly recovered herself, and again took Silla by the hand, not condescending to disguise the situation. To Fanny she replied with an imperious—

'What is the matter?'

'His lordship,' replied Fanny.

'Well?'

'He had another attack an hour ago, and now he is dying! They beg your ladyship to come down, and to come quickly.'

Marina strode towards the girl.

'He is dying?' she asked.

During the last three days Fanny had noticed the curious look in her mistress's eyes; but never as at that moment. She was frightened, and did not answer. She stood near the door with a light in her hand, her hair in disorder, her neck bare, looking at Marina with wild eyes still heavy with sleep.

'Come,' said Marina to Silla, and she dashed out, dragging him after her, into the dark passage.

The priest is down there,' said Fanny, speaking once more.

Silla's first instinct was to offer resistance, to throw off the strong hand that gripped his; but a voice within him cried out, 'Coward! Desert her now?' He followed Marina. Fanny brought up the rear, holding the light high above her head. She was dazed, and kept muttering to herself.

The very light seemed to be agitated, as though in the dark passage it met the chill breath of death.

The light of another candle appeared on the staircase, and somebody called out from below,—

'Miss Fanny, Miss Fanny!'

It was the footman, who was breathlessly mounting the stairs candle in hand. Without taking any notice of the other two, he asked Fanny whether she had a crucifix.

'No, no, in Giovanna's room, in Giovanna's room,' Catte called out after him from below. Fanny burst into tears, and the footman, with a gesture of annoyance, went downstairs again and entered into a violent argument with Catte. A door opened in the distance, somebody indignantly said 'Hush,' and immediately afterwards the doctor could be heard asking in a firm, loud tone for,—

'Ice!'

Whispering voices repeated hurriedly,—

'Ice, ice.'

Marina did not hurry now, she went downstairs very, very slowly, alarmed in spite of herself. The shadows in the castle were full of terror; those frightened voices, those lights whose flickering reflections were seen here and there, increased it. Before she had reached the passage on the floor below she saw Vezza and Mirovich walking hurriedly along, bending forwards, without

collars or ties. The gardener, who was bringing the ice caught them up, jogging them with his elbow as he passed in front of them. Suddenly the deep voice of Don Innocenzo was heard,—

'*Renova in eo piissime Pater, quidquid terrena fragilitate—*'

Then the voice ceased. A door had been opened and again closed.

As Marina and Silla stepped into the passage, followed by Fanny, they saw Vezza and Mirovich open the door of the Count's room very gently and slip in; and they again heard, for an instant, the voice of Don Innocenzo.

'*Commendo te omnipotenti Deo.*'

Fanny gave a cry, put down the light upon the floor, and fled.

'Silly girl!' said Marina. Then she whispered to Silla,—

'The other night, as I was on my way to avenge myself upon him, I fell down just here, at this very hour. Did I not tell you that I had killed him?'

She took a step forward. But at that moment she felt her waist encircled by Silla's powerful hands, and he lifted her bodily on to the staircase. In her amazement she remained silent for a moment, then, thinking that he was going to kiss her, she said, smiling,—

'Afterwards!'

He did not speak.

'Well, let me go?'

'No,' replied Silla. It was no longer the amorous voice of an hour ago, but that of one who suddenly sets eyes on some scene of horror.

'What do you mean?' she said, writhing and twisting like a snake in the claw of a falcon. Then she suddenly assumed a sinister calm.

'Ah, that light there? Who left it there?' said Catte coming from the opposite direction, towards the Count's room. Another agitated voice repeated,

'*Ave Maria, Ave Maria.*'

Fanny had placed the light on the first step. Catte and Countess Fosca were passing by, and they looked up the staircase and stood still. Silla, almost involuntarily, let go of Marina and she sprang down the stairs and into the passage, under the astonished eyes of the two women, passing on in front of them without a word. Countess Fosca, who was closely wrapt up in a big black shawl, looked at Silla, and her broad vulgar face lighted up with an expression of stern dignity as she passed on in silence. Silla stepped into the passage and saw her enter the Count's room with Catte. Not seeing Marina, he understood that she must have already gone into the room, and he madly struck his forehead with his clenched fists. Then he hastily, on tiptoe, approached the door of the dying man and listened.

'*Suscipe Domine,*' Don Innocenzo was saying, '*servum tuum in locum sperandæ sibi salvationis a misericordia tua.*'

A deep voice, short and solemn as the note of an organ, replied,—

'*Amen.*'

Silla caught hold of the door handle with the clutch of a drowning man. The door was opened, and someone whispered, 'Come in.'

The light of a candle on the floor near the bed fell on the white hanging folds of the sheets, on the brass knobs of the bedstead, on the splinters of ice scattered about the floor; and it threw across the room a big shadow of Don Innocenzo as he stood near the dying man, who was breathing heavily, rapidly, with a rattle in

the throat. At the foot of the bed, in the half-light, stood the doctor; beside him knelt Giovanna, smothering her sobs in the coverlet. Scattered about the large dark room, kneeling, were Countess Fosca and her son, Vezza, the servants, and the gardener. The latter and the Count's valet were weeping. Mirovich, old man of the world, stood leaning against the wall in a corner. He would gladly have gone away; he remained out of regard for the Countess.

Another person stood in the middle of the room, a few paces from the door—Marina. The shining tip of a little shoe, the white skirt with its blue embroidery, were plainly visible; her arms seemed to be folded; of her face nothing could be seen either by Countess Fosca, Nepo, or Vezza, who were all watching her.

Don Innocenzo was repeating in a loud voice the prayers *commendationis animæ*, with the book in his hand, but without looking at it. He did not seem to notice either Marina or Silla. His gaze rested on that head with the open mouth and the closed eyes, covered with ice, reposing on the left shoulder, cadaverous in hue. He spoke in the accent of heartfelt prayer; but when he said: *Ignorantias ejus, quæsumus, ne memineris, Domine*, the words had a nobler and more pathetic ring; they seemed to express a passionate belief that God would receive that soul into His rest, a soul which after doing good upon earth without thinking of Him was about to appear before Him, like one who steering steadily for a known port comes upon new continents and glorious scenes unknown. In that night of grief and timid whisperings, the sacred, sonorous words addressed with such deep faith to a Being assumed to be present, invisible, above the man struck down by Him, assumed to be lord of him who spoke and of all around him,

whether believers or not, filled the room with dread. They felt the presence of two superhuman powers; one luminous, eloquent, holy, tenacious, untiring; the other mysterious, silent. What seemed marvellous was this, that the former, whom the man lying there had not known in life or in death, and whom he had offended with expressions of indifference, or worse, had come in his last hour without a prayer from him, from whom neither good nor evil was now to be expected, in order to shield and defend him and speak for him in the coming dread ordeal. As the priest paused for a moment the dying man was heard to breathe loud and rapidly, as though a lion had sprung upon him. Suddenly the rattle diminished.

'It is the end,' said Don Innocenzo, turning towards the others. Seeing Marina standing, he signed to her to kneel, and then bent over the bed, and in a clear voice repeated the final prayers.

Marina took two steps forwards; the light from the candle fell on the white face, the distended nostrils, the knitted brows.

'Count Cæsar!' she said.

Every one started up in horror to look at her—all except Don Innocenzo. The latter merely made a sign to her with his left hand. She did not step back; did not stir. Holding out her arms she pointed the two forefingers, like two daggers, at the dying man, exclaiming,—

'Cecila is here—'

An angry noise of smothered exclamations, a scraping of chairs, a shuffling of many feet, filled the room. Don Innocenzo turned round.

'Back!' he said.

Nepo, Vezza and Mirovich took one step towards

the woman standing like a ghost in the middle of the room.

'In the name of God take her away,' sobbed Giovanna. 'It was she who killed him.'

At that moment Marina flung back the arms with the clenched hands, and bent her head and shoulders forwards. Neither of the three ventured to approach her, or to check the hissing words,—

'With her lover!—'

Then Silla was seen to spring upon her, lifting her in his arms.

'To see you die!' she cried, struggling in the air. In another second there was a violent exit from the room. Silla and Marina disappeared, the room was again silent. Nepo, Vezza and the advocate moved on tiptoe towards the door.

'Nepo,' said Countess Fosca, firmly, *sotto voce*. 'Here!'

He obeyed and went up to her. The other two left the room.

'Count Cæsar heard nothing,' said Don Innocenzo, taking the candle and placing it on the little table. 'He sleeps in peace.'

The doctor approached, laid one hand on the Count's heart, drew out his watch, and said in a loud voice,—

'Thirty-five minutes past one.'

Don Innocenzo immediately began the prayers for the dead.

A voice at the door called to the doctor, who went out. The servants also, by Nepo's order, left the room, with the exception of Giovanna, who knelt at her master's bedside, making, in a feeble, grief-stricken voice, the responses. Nepo lighted two candles which stood on the chest of drawers. The little flames, growing larger like two stupefied eyes, gradually showed to his covetous

gaze the Count's keys on the chest of drawers, Countess Fosca a few paces off, and Mirovich, who came back looking pale, and with an expression of fear of the thing stretched out on the bed, on the left. He paused in the doorway and looked at Nepo, frowning. The Countess, on seeing him, burst into tears, and going up to him took his arm, and with a courteous bow, he led her from the room.

Taking the keys and a candle, Nepo quietly endeavoured to open a chest which stood against the wall, facing the bed, trying all the keys without success.

'Good heavens!' said Giovanna, in distress and disdain. Don Innocenzo stopped praying.

'Either pray or leave the room,' he said.

But Nepo paid no heed. Bending over the chest and turning the key, his long nose almost touching it, he looked like a savage weasel curved over a hole, spying out, scenting out its prey.

Don Innocenzo flushed with wrath.

'I will deal with him,' he said.

He would have seized him and thrown him out of the room, had not Giovanna plaintively restrained him.

'Let be,' she said. 'Go on praying, go on praying, do not desert him.'

Meanwhile Nepo had found the right key, had opened the chest, and after a brief search had extracted a folded document. He held it to the candle to read the endorsement, burning his hair in doing so. Mirovich, entering unnoticed at this moment, remarked sternly,—

'My business.'

'It should be read at once,' said Nepo, embarrassed. 'I want to know where I am, in whose house.'

They went out together.

Even the prayers *in expiratione* were ended. Don

Innocenzo prayed on for a short time, and then said farewell to Giovanna, who was speechless.

The poor old woman, left alone with her master, placed the two lighted candles at the head of the bed, and arranged the chairs scattered about the room, quietly, as though the Count was sleeping. Then she sat down at the bedside, looking at the crucifix which had been placed on the dead man's breast. She had faithfully, humbly, served the Count for forty years, receiving from him words neither of reproof nor of regard, but feeling that he had entire confidence in her and a secret liking for her. In his lifetime she had always cherished the inferior's distant, respectful wish for his well-being. Never had she felt that she was so much to him as now, when he was no longer master in his own house, when strangers freely laid hands on his keys, while she alone among so many servants, so many friends, remained with him, faithful to him as in the days of his pride and strength. Never had she been so much to him as now, when the crucifix was lying on his breast; a tiny crucifix taken that night from her own room. She rose, and, for the first time, kissed, one after the other, the lifeless hands between which the crucifix lay; it soothed and relieved her, and she wept.

Don Innocenzo, on going into the passage, found it was dark. Groping his way for a few steps along the wall, he lost his bearings and stood still, intending to go back in search of a light, and listened. He heard, at intervals, cries and lamentations from the floor above, and words which he could not catch. Still, he recognised the voice of Donna Marina. Nobody answered her. The dull sound of hurried footsteps crossing the passage above was heard, then it died away. Below, before, behind Don Innocenzo, all was silence. What was going

on up there? The cries and lamentations continued. Hours of tribulation in which the heart of the household beats no more, and agitation, and confusion, and disorder seize on the limbs deprived of control! Don Innocenzo, calm face to face with death, calm during the terrible apparition of Marina, now became disturbed.

A quick step crossed the passage above and moved on to the stairs.

'Light!' said Don Innocenzo.

'Good gracious!' exclaimed the person, running away rapidly into the darkness.

The curate recognised Rico and called to him, but in vain. In front of him he saw a faint light now appear, now disappear. Moving towards it on the chance he pushed open a door and found himself in the loggia.

'Ah, his reverence!' said Rico, who was on the point of bolting out at the opposite door.

It might be two o'clock. The air was cold. The sky was again covered with clouds weirdly lighted between the invisible moon that had just risen, and the silent mirror of the lake.

'Come here,' said the curate. 'Where are you off to?'

'I am going for the medicine.'

'What is it?'

'Hark!'

The cries at that moment broke out afresh louder than before. Don Innocenzo leant over the balcony, and looking up towards the right saw the light in the corner window of the floor above. The voice came from up there. Reproaches, imprecations, lamentations, then silence.

'It is Signora Donna Marina,' said Rico, *sotto voce*. 'She seems to be mad. The doctor and Signor Silla are up there. She does just go on against Signor Silla!'

'Is there nobody else?'

'Yes, my mother. Miss Fanny was there for a moment, but she ran away.'

'And what is it you are after?'

'How can I tell? The doctor used a word like "coral." And he told me to fetch Battista's Luisa to come and nurse her.'

Don Innocenzo produced a letter from his pocket and gave it to the lad.

'Take it,' he said, 'to Signor Silla's room and then we will go together.'

In the other wing of the castle a confused agitation began. Through the chinks of more than one door there issued whispers and gleams of light. The bell-wires trembled and jumped impatiently; and one heard the notes of the bells ring out clearly, imperiously. On the staircase Don Innocenzo saw Momolo, who was going down with a light in his hand.

'Going, sir?' he said. No reply was given. As soon as they had left the castle Rico ran off on his errand, and the curate walked away slowly, looking at the large, solemn cypresses. At the gate he met Steinegge. 'You here?' he said.

'The bell; I heard the passing bell,' replied Steinegge, in an agitated voice; 'Oh, this is a terrible loss. I could shed tears for this man.'

'He embraced Don Innocenzo, smothering a sob, and then said hurriedly,—

'Can I go in? Have you seen Signor Silla?'

'Ah!' replied Don Innocenzo, 'I should think I have!'

And he described the long scene, and repeated what Rico had told him.

Steinegge became greatly excited; he hardly waited

till Don Innocenzo had finished, and hurried away with a gesture of determination which expressed, 'Let me have a word.' He entered the castle as the gardener hurried out, without recognising him.

Going up the stairs he met Catte and Fanny, who was crying and saying,—

'I want to go away, I want to go away.'

'You will go,' replied Catte, 'but have patience, my dear girl. Can you leave your mistress in her present state?'

'I don't know. I want to go away.'

'Holy Virgin, what an affair!' said Catte to Steinegge, who was pressing against the banister to let them pass, eyeing them with astonishment. He was going to put a question, when Countess Fosca called out from upstairs,—

'Hi, Momolo!'

'Coming, your Excellency!' replied Catte, and hurried away downstairs, dragging Fanny with her.

Steinegge, however, hastened up the stairs.

'Momolo,' said the Countess, mistaking Steinegge for her servant. 'Did the man understand, eh? A luggage cart and a fly at six. Ah, it's you. I beg your pardon.'

'Your ladyship is leaving?'

'Yes, yes; I curse the day on which I came here!'

Just then Nepo called to his mother from the dining-room door. Behind him she saw the advocate Mirovich seated at a table with a lamp, an inkstand, and two large sheets of paper in front of him. The Countess went in and the door was shut in Steinegge's face. In the loggia he found Vezza leaning over the balcony above the lake, and went up, hat in hand, to speak to him, but the latter barely glanced at him, and signing to him to be silent turned away his head to listen.

A long, feeble groan was heard.

'Donna Marina?' said Steinegge.

Vezza did not reply, he listened again. Nothing more was heard. Then, as though waking from a dream, he began talking rapidly.

'Terrible goings on, you know. Did they tell you?'

'Yes, the curate told me something.'

'Ah, you can have no idea of that scene! Look.' And Vezza described the whole scene minutely, speaking *sotto voce*, and now and then stopping to listen.

'I go out,' he continued, 'with Mirovich, the Salvadors' lawyer. We find Donna Marina in the passage, writhing in terrible convulsions. She did not cry out, because she had fastened her teeth in the man's coat, here, on the chest; she was groaning. We send for the doctor, the maid, the gardener's wife. With great difficulty they succeed in dragging her up the stairs, without being able to unclench her teeth. After that I know nothing accurately; the violent delirium probably continued. Now she is quieter, but up to a short time ago it was a series of cries, maledictions, incoherent supplications. She was always talking to him. He is there, you know? He's never left the room. It is incredible, when one thinks of that scene in the loggia, here, only last year. By the way, do you know that to-night, when poor Cæsar had his final attack, those two were together?'

'Were together?'

'Together, together! Fanny found them in her room.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Steinegge. He threw down his hat and waved his arms wildly.

'Together,' repeated Vezza, after a moment's silence, 'and in a minute everybody knew it.'

'Commendatore,' said Nepo, from the other end of the loggia, 'will you oblige me?'

Vezza went, returning shortly afterwards.

'What confusion!' he said. 'Do you know they are going?'

'Who?' replied Steinegge, abstractedly.

'The Salvadors; at six. Count Nepo lost no time. He immediately searched for and found the will, which was drawn by Count Cæsar himself, and is dated a fortnight ago to-day. The hospital at Novara is residuary legatee. The estate at Lomellina is left upon trust for sale to raise, within two years, a sum of three hundred and twenty thousand francs, which, says the testator, "I bequeath to my cousin, Count Nepomuceno Salvador of Venice." Donna Marina gets nothing. An infinite number of legacies follow. Cæsar, like the gentleman he was, has forgotten no one. There is also an annuity for you. I am appointed executor. After all, it is natural enough that the Salvadors should go; it would hardly be dignified for them to remain. The Count wanted to make a scene, fight a duel, and so on; but he allowed himself to be dissuaded.'

Catte here came up asking Vezza to go to the Countess, and Steinegge remained alone.

He had never been a great dreamer, had poor Steinegge, but in his fifty years of life he had had his little dreams, such as that his country might be free, and that he might enjoy domestic happiness. His last timid, humble dream had been that his wife would recover, and that he would earn a living in Alsace; when fortune dispelled that dream he dreamt no more.

Or rather he had believed that his dreams were over, for now, as he looked at the lake from the loggia of the castle with a great bitterness in his soul, he realised that another hope which he had cherished spontaneously, unconsciously, had been destroyed; and it made him

sick at heart. Who would have believed that Silla would dissemble in that fashion? He determined to wait for him.

No sound came now from Marina's room; all that wing of the castle was silent. From the other side could be heard the banging of doors, the ringing of bells. The door of the loggia was frequently opened; names were whispered, no answer; a head peeped in; then it vanished, and the door gently closed. Women's voices were raised in dispute, then they suddenly ceased. The gravel in the court crunched beneath many feet, which then mounted the stone steps. Higher up, among the paths of the vineyard, men called out to each other, and sometimes laughed. The Salvadors' luggage happened to have been packed two days before; the Countess was now having them taken to the gardener's lodge.

Steinegge, standing in the last arch of the loggia, with his back to the lake and his arms folded, waited with his eyes fixed on the door through which he hoped to see Silla come.

At last he heard the steps of two people coming along the passage. He held his breath and listened; they were not talking. The door opened.

'That is understood then, doctor,' said Silla. 'Having regard to the serious circumstances under which my aid was called for, and the state of coma and exhaustion in which she is at present, I may ask you to say that if anyone wishes to see me, I shall be for an hour in the loggia.'

The voice was cold and sinister. Somebody carrying a light turned back; the doctor crossed the loggia, then Silla entered.

Steinegge went to meet him.

'Signor Silla,' he said.

Silla did not answer, did not even look at him, but went and leant over the balcony above the court.

Steinegge stepped forward.

'Signor Silla, don't you know me?'

Silence.

'Oh, I see; very well.'

He returned to his original post and looked silently at Silla, who did not stir.

'I am not aware,' he said, 'I do not believe that I have deserved this.'

No answer.

'It is rather hard, Signor Silla, to come as a friend and to be received thus. I only wished to say to you that I would rather not have seen you here again; and now I would rather see a good honest bullet through your heart. I came to say this and something else, but since you will not listen I will go. Good-bye.'

He was going away, when Silla, without turning his head, said coldly,—

'Tell your daughter that I have kept my word, and have fallen into the abyss.'

'Tell that to my daughter!'

'Yes; and now go. Go, go, go!' repeated Silla, with sudden passion, seeing that Steinegge had turned towards him. The latter bowed his head resignedly and went away.

Two lanterns and a silent procession crossed the court. Immediately afterwards Vezza comes to inform Silla that the Salvadors have gone to wait for their carriage at the gardener's lodge, and that, with his permission, he will communicate a clause in the Count's will which concerns him.

The door closed behind them; the loggia remained deserted.

CHAPTER V

UNFIT TO LIVE

THE dawn was breaking over the gloomy rocks of the *Alpe dei Fiori*, as they lay in a sea of mist, and was lighting up the lofty grey summits which slumbered wrapt in their woody mantles, and the farthest spurs towards the west blurred in a mist of rain, and the dull leaden lake. There it was not yet raining. Not a leaf stirred in the fig trees and mulberry trees and olives, which, from the neighbouring fields, hung over the still water. Their reflections and those of the low stone walls, and scattered huts and rocks and bushes were clear and perfect. But from the west the rain was coming up like a sail slanting from heaven to earth, growing ever bigger. The poplars in the meadows felt its approach, and a shudder ran through them. Even the lake began to roar, and became pitted with small dark spots. These moved forwards, spreading rapidly, till they mingled in one broad ruffled line in a series of tremulous wavelets, which rose and spread out fan-like, whispering along the shore. Here and on the lake itself, divided more than ever from the world, shut off it seemed for ever from the sun, there were mysterious gatherings full of solemn thoughts, confidential whispered colloquies, a cloister-like quiet in which the air and the rocks talked of lofty mysteries and hidden passions.

The hills disappeared entirely behind the white cloud of rain, against which stood out in black the poplars in the meadows, which one after the other, from the most distant to the nearest, turned grey in turn, and vanished like ghosts fleeing before the day. Meanwhile the little waves advanced ever forwards, moving in serried lines against the castle. They beat, murmuring, against the walls, and went whispering inquisitively into the boat-house. No voice made reply. The west wing had all its windows closed, but those in the other one were mostly open. Yet, even thence, there came no sound or sign of life, though there was a confusion of unmade beds, and open boxes and chairs standing foolishly in the middle of the rooms; and though, at a window on the second floor, there appeared a human face cold as stone and paler than the dawn.

Having received Vezza's communication, Silla leant out of the window. He knew now that Marina was not even mentioned in the will, and that the Count had left him the furniture formerly belonging to his mother, and ten thousand francs in consideration of his assistance in the scientific work begun the year before, which he was to carry on when and how he might think best. But he was not thinking about that. He was watching the slow advance of the day, and the rain and the waves. He saw everything indistinctly—his head was heavy as lead—his heart devoid of feeling. He knew that he was constrained, by his dishonourable and treacherous conduct, to a dire necessity; to link his lot to Marina's, mad or not. And he was calm and cold even to the heart. The sky the lake and the rain counselled him to sleep. Closing the window, he threw himself dressed upon his bed. He found it softer and more yielding than ever, the pillow was pleasant as a caress, he

desired to sleep and to forget: he was beginning to feel drowsy when he noticed a stranger who was watching him.

He watched him quietly for some time; then shrugging his shoulders, raising his eyebrows, and holding out his hands, he shook his head as though to say: there is no remedy. Silla seemed to feel, as the most natural thing in the world, that the stranger gesticulated thus and did not speak because he was dead. Then he suddenly recognised in him an old friend of the family who had committed suicide fifteen years ago. He recognised the large bald forehead, the clean-shaven, pointed chin, between the tips of a high collar, and the black tie and malachite scarf-pin. At the same time he felt surprised that he had not recognised him at once; he might have known he would come. Indeed, the ghost, reading his thoughts, smiled at him. That smile was a second revelation. It made Silla trace back a certain thought to the time of his early manhood. It had begun with a pleasant melancholy, with the vague desire for a distant home; then it became a passing presentiment, then a suspicion, always combated but always stronger, always veiled in mystery, like some slow, hideous disease which gnaws our vitals, whose name we recognise but never admit. Finally, it overpowered his will and became an unanswerable dictum, a crushing sentence in three words—UNFIT TO LIVE. Silla, in his mind's eye, saw those three words distinctly, and the phantom, always smiling, drew near, and, with staring eyes, began to press heavily upon him, chilling him to the bone, making his breath come short. When the hands reached his heart, he heard and saw no more.

It seemed to him that he woke up alone, feeling an infinite pleasure in repeating 'Now I am not dreaming.'

He was in another world in a dim half-light, all silence and repose. He gazed, lying face downwards, into a motionless lake, and saw, slowly passing through it, the reflection of a globe high in the heaven, the colour of a rainy dawn, and he kept saying to himself, 'Ah, I have left it! I have left that world of misery,' and he felt a deep sense of consolation, as one feels in a dream of love. But then suddenly that dull-grey globe ceased in its onward progress. He noticed that its size increased rapidly, immeasurably, and seized with indescribable terror, he awoke.

In front of him, through the open window, he saw a broad, white light, and raised his head in horror, thinking he was still dreaming. When he had recovered himself, he sat up in bed, and felt that his heart pained him. His head was heavy as lead, and his limbs were numbed by the cold damp air from the window, then half-whispering, he replied to his own dream: 'It is true; to die is but to go on sleeping. To sleep, to sleep.' Above his pillow the inspired angel by Guelcino was praying passionately, silently pleading to God for him: 'Who has flung him down to earth? Who denied him the desire of his soul? Who made him unconscious, and detained him, and led him back on the road to this hour of agony?'

Silla involuntarily glanced at the dark mirror opposite his bed. He caught a glimpse of a pale face and two weary eyes. He thought that he looked dead already, and that he had been as pale in former days after some intoxication of the senses, when his soul was sad and remorseful. He felt no remorse, nor any spiritual force whatever; the very wish to die which came over him indicated a spiritual collapse. Getting off his bed, he walked staggering to the table, and sat down with his elbows

resting on it, taking his aching, whirling head between his hands. In a dim way he recognised that he must write a line to his relations and to his landlady, and he felt unequal to the effort. Closing his eyes he struggled to collect his ideas, forcibly repressed their disorder, and, stretching out a hand for his pen, he for the first time saw the letter brought by Rico. He looked at it, and not knowing the handwriting put it down without opening it, and began to write to his uncle, Pernetti Anzati, asking him to discontinue the usual quarterly payments, since he, Silla, was happily in a position to give the capital to the Pernetti family, which had been so very fond of him. Before turning over the page he took up the other letter again and opened it. It contained the following few lines, without heading and without date:—

'Edith S. replies to the unknown author that he can become famous, in spite of fortune, in spite of men's injustice. Edith has vowed never to belong to anyone but her old father, who has great need of her; but she is free to cherish in her heart a name which is dear to her, a spirit which will never sink to baseness if it loves as he says it does.'

Silla smiled. 'At this moment,' he said. He read the letter again, and felt his spirit die.

He drew out his pocket-book to place the note inside, but waited an instant looking at the clear, firm writing, thinking of the white hand, of the pure soul of the writer. Abandoning his first idea, feeling his own unworthiness, he put down the pocket-book and burnt the letter, and from the window scattered the little black ashes to the wind and rain. As he was watching

them whirl along the wall a servant entered, saying that Commendatore Vezza wished to see him, and was waiting in his room. Silla left his half-finished letter and went out just as he was, with his hair ruffled and his dress in disarray. As he passed by, the clock on the stairs struck nine.

'We have,' said Vezza, 'always a new surprise here.'

Silla asked no questions; he waited for the other to speak, and for this painful imbroglio to finally come to an end. But the fat little man of the world, instead of speaking, looked hard at him with his hands in his pockets and his chin on his breast.

'Well,' he said, suddenly abandoning this attitude of scrutiny, 'I am in a most painful position. Besides, it's stifling in here.'

He opened a window and sat down in an arm-chair opposite to Silla.

'Most painful,' he repeated.

Silla said not a word.

'But I can't get out of it,' he added with a sigh. 'I am here as an ambassador. An hour ago Donna Marina sent for me.'

Silla started.

'You are surprised. How about myself? But so it is. It might be a quarter past eight when the gardener's wife came and woke me, saying that the Marchioness awaits me. I was thunderstruck. What do you mean, I ask. She tells me her ladyship slept without having recourse to any kind of medicine, and that she woke up about seven, calm and perfectly herself. Only she did not wish the venetian blinds to be thrown open, and preferred to light a candle, or rather two or three. The first thing she asked was whether you were still here.

Then she made them tell her everything she said in her delirium, and all that happened after—'

The commendatore stopped, hesitating.

'Go on,' said Silla.

'After you carried her off from poor Cæsar's room, and especially—excuse me—after you reproached her with what she said there.'

'I did not reproach her in words; but she must have understood that she had horrified me, for she reviled me in her delirium.'

'Just so; and the servant tells me that it was about the horror you showed that the Marchioness kept questioning her most closely. Then she got up and sent for me. Now, I must tell you that I still consider her ill, very ill. She is worse to-day than she was last night, in my opinion. One sees it more in her mouth than in her eyes. The mouth twitches convulsively. But it is a fact that she spoke to me with a coldness, with a calm that was astonishing. She was pale as the dead, I admit; but that is not of consequence. She begs my pardon for inconveniencing me with unwonted affability, and goes on to say that in the extraordinary position in which she finds herself she has no one to guide or assist her, and that she turns to me as an old friend of her uncle's. I naturally place myself at her service. She then asks me—excuse me, Signor Silla, you are unfortunately mixed up in the events of the past night. Bear with me; I have no desire to judge you. Do not be offended if I am constrained to remind you of these, and perhaps of other unpleasant things.'

'Proceed, proceed,' said Silla.

'Very well. She asks after the Salvadors; why they have gone? I look at her. Well, I say, for various

reasons. After the events of the past few hours they thought there was no good reason for staying on. This seems to disturb her a little. She says that she understands, and excuses their departure, that, unfortunately, appearances are only too much against her, but that there her folly ended. And here the poor girl tells me a story which convinces me that she is still mad, and with a madness more dangerous, perhaps, than the violent delirium. For a whole week, she says, I have not been responsible for my actions. I have received communications from one who is dead which have disordered my brain. Those communications, she adds, are known to Signor Silla.'

'It is true,' said Silla.

'Whew!' exclaimed the commendatore in amazement. He was not prepared for this confirmation. It upset his ideas, and suggested to him the suspicion that this pale man, with the ruffled hair, and clothes in disarray, was not entirely sane himself.

'It is true,' Silla repeated.

'Spiritualism?' asked the commendatore.

'No. But go on, I beg.'

Vezza had lost his bearings and the thread of his discourse. It required an effort before he recovered himself.

'Well,' he said, 'she went on to maintain that for eight days she had lived in a kind of somnambulism, during which she had done extraordinary things which she now bitterly regretted. She protests her indifference, nay, her repugnance for you, whatever she may have said or done during her dangerous hallucination. She adds that she hopes to make Count Salvador believe this; and, in a word, asks me to assist her. What was I to say? That, personally, I believed her, but that I

saw little probability of convincing Count Salvador. Besides, you will understand, Fanny has not held her tongue as to—'

Silla impetuously intervened.

'As to that,' he said, 'I can give my word of honour.'

'Very well, very well, calm yourself. You understand that, in any event, there is more than sufficient to keep Salvador at a distance. To return to the Marchioness. She then asked me, with a sarcastic smile, if the will had been read. I communicated its contents to her, and she was not at all disturbed. "If I am cut out of it," she says, "that is a reason for a gentleman like my cousin not to desert me." After this she spoke about you; spoke, I must confess, most sensibly. Certain imperious rules of etiquette are on Donna Marina's side, and you, I hope, will not complain if I have promised to convey her message to you. I assure you that I feel I am rendering a service to both of you.'

'She wants me to go?' asked Silla, excitedly.

The commendatore was silent.

'But do you imagine that Count Salvador will return and marry a wife who, everything else apart, is mad and penniless? How are we to take seriously what a woman in such a state may say?'

'Can you put your hand on your heart and tell me, who have been involved only too much in the events of this night, to leave Donna Marina now that she is abandoned by her betrothed, on my account, now that she has fallen from riches to poverty?—for her own money is next to nothing,—now that she is stricken with a terrible disease? I ask you, I repeat, whether I can desert her with a light heart, and return to the world as though nothing had happened, just because this afflicted woman wakes up from her delirium

and says, "Oh, go away?" Go away and leave her in her terrible calamity? Do you advise me to commit this act of treachery?'

'Gently, gently, gently,' said Vezza, somewhat piqued. 'Don't let us use grand phrases, and let us reflect a little. You feel bound, in honour, to constitute yourself the protector of the Marchesina di Malombra. I do not wish to be hard on you, because I never am in love affairs, and because, after such a night, who can have a perfectly cool head? But tell me—forgive my asking—what kind of protection can you afford her ladyship? Reflect well; a protection neither effective nor honourable—a protection which will alienate all her other friends. For the Marchioness has relations who will assist her, if not from affection, from a sense of what is fitting. I know them, and I am sure of this. But it is necessary that you should leave the stage. You see, to speak clearly, this is not even a case of marriage to repair a wrong; the lady rejects you. The lady, above all, is not quite sane. So what are you to do? The only thing you can do is to go away.'

Silla struggled manfully to remain calm, to extinguish a dim ray of hope that entered his heart, and might, at this crisis, disturb his judgment.

'On your honour, Signor Vezza,' he said, 'do you believe that you are giving me good advice?'

'On my honour, I believe it is the only possible advice. You can ascertain Donna Marina's feelings towards you by seeing her. You can then also judge of her state of mind.'

'I? It is not to be dreamt of. If I went, I should not wish to see her.'

'One moment—the Marchioness begged me to give her an account of our present interview, which I will do

with the necessary discretion; she also expressed a wish to speak, whatever happened, to you.'

'Why?'

'Ah! You must ask her. Go! take courage. My age gives me the right to speak to you like a father, Signor Silla. Will you explain one thing to me which I cannot understand, remembering a certain scene last year? Are you sincerely attached to Donna Marina?'

'Pardon me; my sentiments are not now in question.'

'Very well! And I am to tell her that you intend to leave the castle?'

'No; merely ask her to inform me at what hour I am to wait upon her.'

'Very well. To tell the truth, I, personally, should wish you to remain here a few hours. I would beg you to assist me—I have so many things to do. I have to get the district court to seal up everything—you understand, there are so many people in the house. Then the governors of the hospital at Novara have to be written to. I have sent a telegram, but that is not enough. Then the funeral arrangements have to be discussed. The family chapel is at Oleggio. Is the Count to be taken there? Is he to be buried here? By two o'clock they have promised me the printed cards announcing his decease—all these have to be sent off; no light task in itself, for poor Cæsar was related to half Piedmont and to half Tuscany as well. In short, as far as I am concerned, if you were to stay here till this evening I should be rather glad.'

A strong puff of wind came in through the open window, and filled out the curtains.

'Ah! the wind is changing; that's better,' said the commendatore. 'This frightful weather is an infliction in itself.'

Silla did not reply, but bowed silently and returned to his own room wrapt in thought.

What was this new enigma? What was this new irony of fate? He recalled certain instances of maniacs who recovered their reason from one moment to another, on waking. Possibly Donna Marina's delirium was only a transient attack, a nervous exaltation produced by circumstances which were certainly unusual.

If Vezza was mistaken? If she had really recovered? She despised and rejected him now; the grievous chain had indeed been broken.

There remained the remorse and the shame of having returned to the castle, to the loss of his own self-respect, with a secret design of wrong-doing, to become the accomplice of a mortal enemy of the Count, while the latter, who had loved and benefited him, was lying stricken down by death. But if he remained free, would it not be possible to rise once more, to purify himself by some long and bitter expiation? A secret voice whispered this hope to him, and repeated Edith's words, 'It will never sink to baseness if it loves as he says it loves.' It was not the Silla of a few hours since who sat there letting his imagination wander thus, while the angel above the bed prayed unceasingly. The idea of suicide had now left him. He did not wish to make any resolutions for the future; he would wait till he had seen and spoken to Donna Marina. Oh! if God would show mercy to him, and raise him up once more! His religious feeling, his faith in a secret contact between God and the soul, and in the salutary influence of pain, revived. He hid his face in his hands, recalling an hour of depression when, opening the Bible at hazard, he had read, '*Infirmatus est usque ad mortem, sed Deus misertus est ejus.*' What consolation, what revivifying energy there was in this

thought! Pictures of a nobler future rose to his mind, but he tried to blot them out, fearing that he was deceiving himself and only preparing bitterer disillusions. He might enter, to punish himself, his relative's spinning business, and give the day to the thankless toil and the night to study; then he could say, 'I am still worthy of a place in her heart.'

These thoughts aroused within him a storm similar to the one which was sweeping over the roof and the walls of the castle. It was still raining there, but the jutting crags of the *Alpe dei Fiori* stood out black against the clear sky, shining in the rush of the north wind as it raged and stormed around them, though it was bringing fine weather.

CHAPTER VI

A CLEAR SKY

'HERE is the acanthus that I wished to show you,' said Don Innocenzo to Steinegge. 'A fine one, eh?'

It was basking in the sunshine, in haughty melancholy, in the middle of a big grey rock, flanked by two small clumps of trees. At the top, between the rock and the blue sky, some scanty shrubs waved gaily in the wind which swept headlong down the valley, and whistled through Don Innocenzo's orchard, and round the roof of the parsonage, and spread in great waves of air over the meadows. Clumps of brambles hung down from fissures in the stone, long twining branches of ivy mounted upwards from the roots buried beneath the grass still wet with rain. That huge, half-bare rock, so greatly loved by the ivy, so patient to the brambles, represented the life, the speech, the loves of the village. Don Innocenzo had caused a rustic seat to be placed there, and would pass whole hours reading and meditating.

'There is a southern look about that acanthus, isn't there? I very often come here with a book and my own thoughts, and in the air I breathe an innocence which purifies the soul. I have need of it, because I am envious, ill-tempered, vindictive and ambitious; no,

not ambitious, but, possibly, avaricious; I sometimes feel that I am avaricious, that I worry myself too much about some wretched little investments of mine. You see I am confessing myself to you. Will you give me absolution? I shall go on, because it does me good, and you must do as you like. Well, when I see cultivated fields, I see so many people between me and God; here I feel there is nobody, and I speak to Him face to face, and the more readily, because it is about my own private griefs. I daresay you have similar moments. Is there never anything which causes you disquiet?'

Steinegge all at once thrust his stick into the ground.

'Oh, how blind of me!' he said. 'How stupid I've been not to have understood! not to have suspected! Do you believe that she was very fond of him?'

'Oh, no, not very fond, let us hope. But come!' said Don Innocenzo, mortified at the small amount of attention given to his discourse, 'calm yourself. Don't make me regret having told you everything. I spoke in order to prevent your asking your daughter for an explanation of that speech of Signor Silla's. You must not mention it to her, it would pain her too much. For the rest, perhaps it is better so; nay, let us say right out: It is better so. Do you know what kind of a man he was, this Signor Silla?'

'What kind of a man? No; how could I? I was so fond of him! Even now I cannot judge him as you do.'

He struck his forehead as though he wished to crush the painful thoughts within.

'For me,' he said, 'for me! I would kiss the ground on which she treads, and then I would say to her: Trample upon me, for I do not understand. Don't you see that it is too much for me to possess the whole of

Edith's love, and that I sometimes feel remorse about my great selfishness, and that I should have been pleased at such a marriage, because I am old, and there are other things to think about.'

'Come,' said Don Innocenzo, moved, taking Steinegge by the arm, and leading him to the rustic seat, 'let us stop here and think it over, and endeavour to discover what your daughter's reasons were.'

Steinegge stopped suddenly, fearing some new revelation.

'Eh?' he said.

'Come, come, sit here.'

Don Innocenzo could not find the right words; he kept rubbing his hands briskly together, and pursing up his lips.

'Have you ever observed,' he began at last, 'that your daughter seemed preoccupied, that she had any secret anxiety?'

Steinegge started.

'Money?' he said.

'No, no.'

A terrible fear contracted the poor man's features.

'Health?'

'No, no. Listen. It might be that your daughter wished to think of you alone, give herself up to you alone, in fact, live for you alone, until the time when you, dear old friend'—here Don Innocenzo took him by the hand—'understood what is the secret anxiety which I know fills the mind of that dear young lady, your daughter Edith.'

'You know!' said Steinegge, turning pale, and pressing the priest's hand, while he looked at him open-mouthed.

'Let us suppose I am not a priest,' continued the

curate. 'For the present, I am not a priest, but a friend. Very well. Will you listen to me as a friend?'

Steinegge nodded his head vigorously, without being able to speak.

'Well, very well. Now, you have had a hard life, have you not? You have been persecuted and calumniated, more especially by men wearing my cloth? Say so frankly. Do you think that I don't know any priests that are rogues? Well, you have conceived a great aversion to them all—no, not to me; no, but it is an exception. Then you have conceived a great contempt for another thing infinitely superior to those miserable priests—for the Word, of which they ought to be the guardians and ministers. Let me finish; you can speak later. I believe fully that after Edith's arrival you drew nearer to the Word; how could you do otherwise? With her at your side, you must have felt its warmth and light; but, up to the present time, how much have you in common in matters of religion? Very little, have you not? You cannot say you are a Catholic, hardly, indeed, a Christian. Now Edith believes, and must believe, that unless you submit yourself honestly to the Church, you and she cannot share together the Resurrection and the Life. This is her secret grief. All your daughter's love, all her thoughts are centred here. She lives for that work alone. I am confident that she aims at the sacrifice of herself, and finds therein a peculiar joy and a new vein of hope. You can feel proud to be loved thus. Your daughter trusts in God to accomplish her dream; do you understand? She will not say to you: If you love me, do this. Never! She wishes your two souls to dwell in close proximity, in constant communication, so that little by little, imperceptibly, each day,

each hour, the Faith may enter your soul, my dear old friend. Perhaps I ought not to have told you this.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Steinegge, in a broken voice of protest.

'Perhaps I ought not to have done so, but just now, when you said "I don't understand," something within me overcame my prudence, and I thought to myself, Now one ought to speak; such a sacrifice ought to be appreciated. I won't speak to him as a priest, but as a friend, and, as priest, I do not speak. I will only say that I should not have advised this sacrifice, and that I venerate your daughter.'

Steinegge tilted his hat on to the back of his neck, clasped his hands, and nervously agitated them, looking up into the sky; then he hid his face in his hands, resting his elbows on his knees.

'I knew,' he murmured, 'that the first evening—but then, afterwards—I thought that she was content.'

Don Innocenzo bent down to catch the words, which had escaped him.

'Eh?' he asked affectionately.

'I thought that she was content,' repeated his friend, without uncovering his face, 'for now I pray with her—I even go to church—I have forgiven everyone; I thought it was enough.'

The curate felt inclined to put an arm round his neck and say,—

'Yes, go in peace; for you, poor, weary one, simple and humble of heart, it is enough. You are like a boy sent by his father out into the world to work, and the lad, beaten and persecuted by his comrades, returns, having learnt nothing and earned nothing, to the paternal house. He knocks, weeping, at the door, which the servants have shut in his face, as a ne'er-do-

weel. His father has seen, and knows all. Great God, will not you receive and console him?'

He was on the point of saying this, but his glance fell on the cloth he wore, and he checked himself, biting his lips, and keeping the words within his kindly heart.

Steinegge suddenly jumped up.

'Let us go to her, old friend,' he said. 'Let us go quickly. I will do everything you say; let us go quickly.'

'No, no, no,' replied Don Innocenzo, 'she would not accept an act due to your love for her and not to conviction. Do not speak to her of to-day's conversation. Since you say that you pray, go on praying, and ask God to illumine your heart, and if the light comes, then certainly speak to your daughter, saying: I have thought, I have prayed, I believe. Not before. And now, allow me to be a priest again, and to say that I am here entirely at your service. We will talk, and read, and discuss—we will even abuse the priests, if you wish!'

Don Innocenzo added these words, smiling, because Steinegge seemed to hesitate.

'Excuse me,' said the latter, 'I trust you will pardon me, but we will not read or argue. I know your arguments would do no good, for I have heard and have read too many theological arguments already, though neither a philosopher nor a literary man. I should be afraid to hear from you arguments which I knew already, do you see? Arguments which I have heard demolished, and it would make my heart sink if I felt, excuse my frankness, that you fight with casuistry as a weapon. I feel I shall derive more benefit from such an essay as I read a few days ago in a recent German work by Hartmann, whom you would think a great heretic, in which he says that Christianity will finish as it began, *der letzte*

Trost, the last comfort of the poor and the afflicted. This seemed to throw a great light upon your faith. Note that, according to this writer, the human race will one day grieve over the vanity of the world. On the other hand, you cannot find arguments which will hold mankind as in a vice. You ought to hold the world in your hands; you ought to have thought on your side and the passions against you. But it is the contrary which occurs; you have many more servants of passion than servants of thought, many more women than men, much more mob than intellect. No, what you can appeal to is the heart, I imagine; when you have won the heart and drawn it to you, the whole man has to follow. That is what is happening in my case, for my heart is no longer uuder my control. You, my friend, have part of it; and, shall I tell you something? That kindly face, of which I am so fond, above your black coat, is a stronger argument to me than all your theology put together.'

As he pronounced the word 'theology,' Steinegge wrinkled his nose, as though it were a word of evil odour.

'What nonsense!' said Don Innocenzo, with knitted brows and a smile on his lips.

'Oh, no, not nonsense at all!'

'Yes, nonsense. It is not true that we have no arguments. Naturally, religious faith based on a mystery cannot be supported by logical arguments which hold men like a vice. You cannot treat this problem like one in geometry; nevertheless, there is a process of thought which leads towards the mystery, a more rapid process than your wonderful logical one, which, after all, my dear Steinegge, has never led to any great discovery. Let us take the trivial distinction between heart and

mind, or, if you will, love and intellect, and let us remember that they are not different parts of one soul. Is there, by any chance, one bit of the sun which warms and another which shines? Well, *messieurs les philosophes*, when in search of truth, say: We have these two legs, one of which takes enormous strides and bounds, and would, indeed, be capable of leaping a huge chasm across our path. We do not wish to run this risk, we prefer to always feel mother earth beneath our feet. We shall hold this left leg, this sentimental leg, in check; we shall not take a step back with it when necessary, steadying it with the other; no, we shall cut it off, once and for all, and go along on one leg, very gently, as far as we can. And so they do, my dear sir; they set out to conquer the world with one leg, and they call it "positivism." Will these people guide the world? They will guide it ill.'

Don Innocenzo rose, his face rather flushed, and a fine intelligent light in his eyes.

'I tell you,' he continued more calmly, 'that human thought cannot and should not occupy itself with theological researches without a previous moral training. It is necessary that the medium of research, the mind, should be in a suitable condition, that it should retain all its natural tendencies towards good, for the principles of good are the principles of truth. Every passion, beginning with pride, gives the mind a different bias, and alters that tendency; and then, where do we land? We have just seen where one lands. That is why, in our religion, moral teaching precedes dogmatic teaching. This is where the heart renders us the first great service in religious research. It determines the direction, from the starting-point. You start with pride, with sensuality; you, logically, will travel towards

negation, the void and sin, because there is a terrible logical road which leads thither. Start with a pure heart and pure conduct, and you will journey towards the truth. But how? By logic alone? No. By one's heart and feelings? Equally no. With all the faculties of the soul, reason, imagination, love. I speak now of human means of research. I leave grace on one side. It is not a question of induction or of deduction, but of boldly advancing great theories. Imagination is required for this, and ardour and purity of feeling, and, above all, the sublimest faculty we possess, one which I know not how the Rationalists explain—the faculty of grasping by sudden inspiration—'

'I have not got that,' said Steinegge.

'Of grasping ideas above the ordinary mental grasp of the person in question, so that they come on him by surprise. Then a patient logical inquiry begins, in order to see whether these ideas are compatible with one another and with truths already known, and to modify or abandon them if need be. Certainly even this process does not explain mysteries, but we sometimes obtain this valuable result, that they are pointed to exactly where revelation says they exist, like a planet whose position is indicated by an astronomer, and it is afterwards seen there. Then, if not sooner, faith supervenes. I know what your rationalists reply.'

'Oh!' said Steinegge, as though begging to be excused.

A violent gust of wind fell shrieking on the brambles of the rock, set the trees of the wood wildly whirling, with a soughing sound which drowned the speaker's voice. Don Innocenzo, still flushed, not being able to speak, shook his forefinger at Steinegge as though to convey that the rationalist's reply was valueless; then he

raised his head as though to face this obstreperous wind which had with such want of tact drowned the interchange of enlightened ideas, like the uproar and hostile vote of some democratic mob. As soon as possible he resumed.

'The rationalists reply that this mode of arguing may be good for those who use it, but that it proves nothing and cannot help to establish the truth. Foolishness! It may not serve them, who are hardened by their sordid, impotent system; it does serve others. We will talk and read, my friend. I hope, by God's grace, to succeed in persuading you that there is a beauty of truth which stirs and soothes, not the heart only, but the whole human soul; a beauty which we can only see as through a glass darkly, but with what heavenly delight! To see, even though confusedly, the hidden concords, the converging lines of the created and the uncreate; for example, the most lofty mysteries of the Divinity, and the most hidden secrets of men's souls. Let us meditate and contemplate together; yes, we will do that. For the present it is enough; I will say no more.'

'My dear friend,' said Steinegge, with a sigh; 'it may be that you talk very well, but you do not know me. What you propose would be well enough for a young man who feels the need of exercising his brains, has a thirst for knowledge, and takes more pride in making a small discovery by his own exertions than in acquiring much knowledge laid cut and dry on his table. Oh, I know, and perhaps I may have been a little like that myself once. Now I am a weary old man; and my head is full of opinions opposed to yours, and my opinions may be wrong, because the men and the books from whom I took them may not rank very high. I must tell you the truth; some of these opinions have disappeared since

my daughter has been with me; I know not how they came to vanish: certainly not through arguments. I may be able to part amicably with my other views. I can say to them: Be silent, since my daughter wishes it; be absolutely silent when I do this or that, because I cannot put you to flight, but I am determined not to listen to you. Perhaps then, with time, they will depart of their own accord. Bear with me; I believe that I shall feel much greater satisfaction in taking this line than if you were to convince me by argument. What can I give Edith if not this? What can I leave to my daughter when I die, unless it be a perfectly kind and loving recollection of me? Now, it has never even occurred to me, when I have seen Edith going to confession, that I should be divided from her in another life because I don't go down on my knees before a priest; it is an idea absolutely repugnant to me, still, if Edith desires it— Oh, but why, why has she concealed this from me?'

Clasping his hands, he raised them, shaking nervously, towards heaven.

'The first evening, I admit, it did occur to me, and the following morning as well, when I accompanied her to mass in your church here; but then she was always so loving towards me, and so gentle. She often spoke to me of religion, but merely by telling me her own thoughts and feelings, as though it were a matter affecting her and not me. I listened with great pleasure, just as you, who are, and wish to remain, Italian, would listen to my daughter if she spoke to you about our German life, our poetry and our music. When I began to go to church and to pray with her, she was pleased certainly, but she seemed to fear I might weary of it, that I only did it to please her. Only one thing she earnestly begged of me, to forgive my enemies.'

'And you have forgiven them?' said Don Innocenzo.

'I have made the greatest efforts,' replied Steinegge, getting agitated. 'I have not forgiven but forgotten those who have done injuries to me; and even for the others— Here his voice died away, as though suffocated. 'I have done what I could.'

Don Innocenzo, who was moved also, remained silent. Perhaps his conscience reminded him that he had bitterly resented—he, a priest—some wrongs certainly less serious than those endured by poor Steinegge, a Christian without knowing it, a better Christian than himself.

The wind whispered among the copses, among the leafy tree-tops; one saw it gliding over the velvet grass, changing the hue of its green.

'Lovely weather!' said Steinegge, still struggling with emotion.

'Very,' replied the curate.

Steinegge remained silent for a moment, then he passionately embraced Don Innocenzo, saying in smothered tones,—

'Let us go to Edith.'

'Certainly, but do not speak to her now; wait, and thus show her that your resolve is a voluntary one.'

Steinegge's only answer was to take his friend's arm in his, and, pressing it hard, to walk towards the house.

Having gone a few paces they heard Marta calling out from the garden, 'Oh, your reverence, oh! your reverence!' There were people in the garden, men and women. Don Innocenzo in surprise quickened his pace.

He found the Mayor, the president of the charity commission, and the captain of the national guard, who had come to consult with the curate about the Count's

funeral, which was to take place on the morning of the day after to-morrow. There were rumours of handsome bequests to the poor people of the village. The captain, a bearded ex-Garibaldian, had gone direct to the castle for information. There were in fact 70,000 francs for a children's home, and 30,000 francs, the interest to go in three dowries a year to poor girls in the village. The captain had quickly prepared his programme of funeral honours to be paid to the generous testator, and had communicated them to the Mayor and the president of the charity commission, whom, with friendly pity, he termed 'big country bumpkins,' because they, feeling embarrassed and not having the least idea as to 'how these things are done now,' as he put it, stood hesitating and staring at each other, muttering that they knew nothing of these things, and that it was madness to throw away money on a dead man, who, after all, said the Mayor, to the corporation proper, had left nothing. The captain had roused public opinion with a view to stir up these fossils, and had brought them, with a number of his own friends, to the curate to obtain his weighty judgment. These people surrounded Don Innocenzo, all talking at once, calling to each other to be quiet, discussing a medley of plans and amendments—national guard, undress, full dress, one salute, three salutes, the band of this village, the band of that, a sermon in church, an oration at the cemetery. Don Innocenzo with difficulty persuaded them to be quiet, and followed them into the house. Here five or six girls, the liveliest damsels in the village, who had just made a rush on Marta, stepped forward and faced the curate with red cheeks, and eyes bright with laughter. They came in the name of the village maidens to ask for flowers for the coffin of their benefactor. Marta had administered a rebuff, and had

told them they were bold-faced hussies to come and ask for the curate's flowers to put in their own hair or to give to some of the numerous lovers whom they always had dangling after them. One girl made a vivacious retort, and her companions laughed. The curate paid no attention to Marta's angry glances and mutterings; he abandoned his poor flowers without a word.

Steinegge was anxious to see Edith, not to speak to her, but to read her thoughts and to enjoy more keenly the secret satisfaction of feeling that he had pleasant and unexpected news to give her before long. She was not in the garden. Steinegge took leave of the authorities, bowing profoundly, and ran up to his daughter's room.

She was not there. On the bed lay her hat and gloves and a small album. Steinegge opened it, and found a sketch taken from the banks of the lake underneath the poplars. He at once recognised the serrated summits of the *Alpe dei Fiori*, the same which eight months ago had made Edith say: 'We go from idyll to tragedy.' In a corner she had written, *Am Aarensee.* Steinegge at once recalled the melancholy song:—

'Ach tief im Herzen da sitzt ihr Weh,
Das weiss nur der vielgrune Wald.'

The dull, cold landscape, with a light like snow, and shade like lead, recalled the afflicted spirit rather than the green forest. Steinegge felt sad; he thought, in a confused way, that the trouble must be more deeply rooted than Don Innocenzo had said. Where was Edith? Why could he not offer her consolation at once, at anyrate some recompense for the sacrifice she had made? The noise in the dining-room and garden, the harsh voices of the peasants, the careless laughter of the girls irritated

him. If Edith heard that din it would make her feel her solitude the more bitterly. Thinking he heard a step in the garden, he went to the window. It was Edith, who had been laying the table, but went out before the curate and his visitors came in. Steinegge reproved her gently for standing out in the sun without a parasol, and was going to take her one in spite of her protests, but on going into the garden he could not find her. She was not in the house. At last he found her near the garden gate talking to the girls engaged in stripping the rose trees. He did not call out or go to her, fearing he might not be wanted.

Getting behind a corner of the house, so as to be out of sight, he felt that he would go away for ever, and give up Edith, only to recall the moment when Silla had brought his book. Yes, yes, how well he remembered now her passionate protests. And to think that so much trouble, so much pain, was due to his blindness in not having understood his daughter's secret anxiety.

Meanwhile, in the dining-room, matters had been arranged. The voices were lowered. The curate and the others went into the garden, talking quietly.

'Nothing could be better,' said Don Innocenzo, as he glanced towards Steinegge.

'Ah!' replied the captain, 'it was Commendatore Vezza who told me. I made no inquiries, but he told me that Signor Silla is going away this evening, and that one need not believe everything one hears.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Steinegge, his eyes flashing at the pleasant surprise. 'Forgive my taking part in your conversation. What were Signor Vezza's exact words?'

The captain repeated what he had already said, adding, however, what he knew about Marina's state of

health. Then his audience made their comments, each one having a different theory.

Edith had been exerting a little influence over the high-spirited maidens. They told her that the captain had suggested getting the wreath from Como or from Milan, but that they had wished to use flowers from the village. The framework of the wreath was being made. They had not yet decided on the arrangement of the flowers. Edith suggested a wreath of olive leaves and white roses, with a cross of violets. She said she would pick the roses herself to prevent the trees being damaged and the buds spoilt unnecessarily. Hearing the others talking, she imagined that they were talking about the castle, and pricked her fingers without noticing it, and began cutting the stalks either too long or too short. She was so pale that the girls thought she was ill, and begged her not to go on, She confessed to a slight headache, but said she would go on, fearing that her father would call to her and would notice her agitation. Then the men arrived, wished her good evening, and stopped to look at the flowers, and to talk to the girls about their good fortune and the number of weddings there would soon be. Steinegge had remained behind. Edith saw him. He seemed anxious for the group to disperse. He walked up and down, now and then glancing at the people, who seemed to have taken root among the rose trees. Even Marta came to the corner of the house to look, shielding her eyes with her left hand. Then she said something to Steinegge, who motioned to Edith to come near, and met her, holding out the parasol. He reproached her with being determined to get a headache, and added, jestingly, that he was angry with her because she had deserted him that morning, flitting hither and

thither like a butterfly. Where had she been? He feared she had been doing something imprudent, going to dangerous spots, near some treacherous lake, only to pick up verses thrown away months ago.

'Oh, father,' said Edith, 'it is not right to go and look in my sketch-book, nor to make insinuations. I have left the fits of melancholy where they are—in the lake, in the Aarensee. And as to the song on the bank, I have only found the title. That does no harm. And then, don't you remember how we laughed last year? I shall finish that sketch, and shall put in you, sir, running wildly after your daughter with an umbrella under your arm. I wish I could put in the bursts of laughter too.'

'We will put in others,' said Steinegge. 'You see the sunlight, the green grass, the fresh breeze—is it not all like one great laugh? Suppose we were at Milan? There is youth in the air we breathe here We might go for a walk. Are you tired?'

'No, father. But where do you wish to go to?'

'Just for a little walk. Signora Marta! Signora Marta! may I ask at what time we dine?'

'At three!' cried Marta, from the kitchen.

'Well, then, we might go to the paper mill.'

'Excellent! excellent! I will come too,' said Don Innocenzo, who had just got rid of his visitors. 'I have to speak to the engineer in charge.'

Edith ran upstairs for her hat and gloves. When she came down her father and the curate broke off their conversation. She observed a new expression of contentment on their faces, and gave them a searching look.

'Quick! Let us go,' said Steinegge; and, for once forgetting to be formal, he marched on ahead.

'Just turn round,' said Don Innocenzo, 'and see how well my little house looks from here.'

The little house did indeed look well, standing above and apart from the others, gleaming white beneath its slanting roof.

'It looks as though it were looking at us,' said Edith, 'and smiles at us like a good little grandmother who cannot move.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Steinegge, 'I should be glad to live here.'

'So should I, father. One feels kindly disposed to everybody. It is for you, reverend sir, to find us a nest.

'There is mine,' he said. 'An excellent idea! Come and live with the old priest! Why not? Wouldn't it be a good arrangement? Wouldn't you be comfortable? I think old Marta takes sufficient pains?'

Edith smiled, while her father burst into exclamations and protestations of gratitude.'

'No, no,' said Edith; 'we cannot possibly leave Milan; besides, that plan wouldn't do. We should have to take a house.'

'Really? You would go on living in this solitary spot?'

Edith looked grave, surprised. Don Innocenzo became silent.

'She would not be the only treasure buried here,' said Steinegge, turning to the priest with a courteous bow.

Don Innocenzo fenced, blushing and laughing, with the compliment.

'Yes, you would be here too, would you not?' he said.

'Oh, no, I should be like a piece of prehistoric pottery. I could stay here well enough, but my daughter cannot.'

'Why not, father?'

He replied impetuously in German, as he always did when his emotions were roused. Then he turned to Don Innocenzo without awaiting her reply.

'Is it not the fact,' he said, 'that this place is not suitable for a young lady, unless, of course, she were a *Nixe*?'

'A *Nixe*! Who knows?' said Edith. 'I love clear streams and meadows and woods.'

'Oh, yes, but I do not think the *Nixen* love ugly, sallow-complexioned old gentlemen like me, or go out walking with the parish priest. Do you know what I now see in my mind's eye?'

The strange man stood still, spreading out his arms and shutting his eyes.

'I see the most worthy Signor Andreas Gotthold Steinegge, whose hair has grown whiter and who is living in the house of his dear friend here, who has no hair at all. I see this German gentleman, with a newspaper in his hand, hotly discussing the question of Schleswig-Holstein with his friend, who orders him just one *little* glass of Valtellina to wash down the Duke of Augustenburg. Eh, is that not so?'

He opened his eyes for a moment to look at Don Innocenzo, who was laughing, and then closed them again.

'And now I see—oh, what do I see? A young *Nixe* in a travelling dress, who comes into the room like a falling star, and embraces the old owl of a German, and says that she has come to spend a couple of days among the clear streams and meadows and woods. "Alone?" says the owl. Thereupon the *Nixe* makes a little gesture with a little hand which I know,' and, opening his eyes, Steinegge took hold of Edith's hand to kiss it, but Edith

hastily withdrew it, and, leaving her, he took four great strides forwards, laughing, and then turned round to look at her.

'Is it not a pretty vision?' he said.

Edith waited a moment before she answered. She hardly knew what to think. Was there a hidden purpose in her father's remarks, a pre-arranged plan?

'So you are tired of me?' she said. 'You want to live alone?'

'How alone?' exclaimed Don Innocenzo. 'Did not you hear that he would live with me?'

'I am tired, I am very tired of you,' replied Steinegge, but I should not care to live alone. As a change from your company I should come here, to our friend, for some months in each year. Listen—I am not joking now—I should have to spend a great deal of time with the curate.'

Edith looked at the latter. Had he become a principal in the affair? Were things going well? The curate was attentively watching a waggon that was lumbering along the rough road from the paper mill.

'We wish to find a philosopher's stone,' continued Steinegge, 'a stone which changes to gold everything around us that is dark and ugly—around and, still more, within us.'

'And it is to be found here, this wonderful stone?' asked Edith, eagerly.

'I know not. I hope so.'

'And why may I not join in the search?'

'Because it is not necessary, and we do not wish it.'

'But what will you do with me, father?'

'Ah, we don't know yet.'

At this moment the waggon came up, separating Edith

from her two companions. Don Innocenzo stepped rapidly up to Steinegge, whispering,—

'Don't go too far.'

'I can't,' he replied.

The waggon passed by.

They had reached a point near the river where the road makes a bend along the right bank and the line of poplars till it reaches the mill.

'Go on,' said Steinegge to the curate. 'We will wait for you here.'

With his daughter he left the road and walked down a grassy slope, till they reached the shadow of an enormous rock jutting out into the river. The laughing waters formed a poem of delight, an old-fashioned, popular poem such as the ingenuous human heart, overfull of passion and imagination, was wont to make. They passed between banks, here stony, here decked with flowers, leaping, laughing, singing, shining away right down to the rocky bed. They caressed the grass and wore away the stones, while from the mid-current came, now and again, passionate cries and light clouds of foam. To all these voices came as answer the gay rustling of the poplars pointing to the sapphire sky.

'Ah,' said Steinegge.

'*So viel der Mai auch Blümlein bringt*
Zu Trost und Augenweide . . .'

Edith interposed.

'Why did you say that to me, father?'

'Say what?'

'That one day you would be separated from me.'

'Oh, no, not separated; only that I should come and spend some time here. Never separated. Nothing shall separate us. Do you understand? Nothing.'

He said the last words *sotto voce*, taking both her hands in his.

'Yes, I now feel, for the first time, that we must be divided in nothing, in nothing here.'

And he pressed her hands against his heart. He silently drew her down, and sat down beside her on the grass.

'It is impossible,' he went on, as though talking to himself. 'My heart is full of this one subject. Yes, Edith, we have never been in perfect harmony. Do you remember the evening of your arrival, when I came to your room and you were praying at the window? It was agony to me! I thought that you would not love me because I did not believe as you do. And next day, while you were at mass, do you remember that I went out? Do you know what I did during mass?'

He spoke like one who knows not whether to laugh or cry.

'I uttered my thoughts to God; I prayed Him not to come between us, not to take away your love.'

Edith nervously pressed his hand, biting her lip, smiling at him with eyes wet with tears.

'And you have always been so loving and so good that you have made my life a paradise, and I have understood that God has heard my prayer. This has moved me greatly, for I knew that I deserved nothing. Nothing, believe me. So it moved me to see that God permitted you to be so loving to me. I was happy, yet not always. When we went to church together I prayed beside you and thanked God; and yet there was something within my heart, something cold and painful, as though I were outside the door and you in front of everybody, near the altar. In short, I felt I was far away from you. I hated myself at that moment,

and I was so stupid as even to love you less. So when—'

He hesitated a moment, and then, placing his lips against her ear, whispered some words, to which she did not reply, and went on in a louder tone,—

'How much I suffered! A thing so repugnant to me! Perhaps it was through the irritating memories that were in my heart; perhaps because I was jealous of that hidden Being to whom you confided your thoughts. Not only jealous, afraid. I felt that, though invisible and unknown to me, He might strike me, and take away a little of your esteem and love. Do you know that I have passed sleepless nights through this? After I found that you were always the same to me, I began to forget, and recovered my spirits. Yesterday, finding myself in church with Don Innocenzo, I realised how much progress I had made in a few months, without knowing it. I had the impression of standing at an open gate leading to a land of promise, into which I could not enter. Now, listen, Edith, daughter mine.'

She silently turned her face towards him, still pressing one of his hands in hers.

'I have entered in,' he said, in deep, quivering tones.

Edith bowed her head over that hand, and kissed it.

'I have entered. Do not ask me how. I know that the world seems inexpressibly different from what it was now that I cherish the intention of yielding myself entirely to the faith. One can hardly say that all I see gives me a feeling of repose. Yet it is so. I have never felt a sensation of repose similar to that which my eyes bring to my heart. You will smile if I say that I feel a great affection for something which is in surrounding nature. What do you think of all this, Edith?'

She raised her face, it was wet with tears.

'How can you ask me, father? How can you ask me?'

That was all she could say. Her sacrifice had been accepted by God, and rewarded at once. Her soul was agitated by this belief mingled with fear; with disdain at not feeling quite happy.

'Are you content?' said Steinegge. He stepped down to the river and dipped in his handkerchief, which he handed to Edith, who smiled as she wiped her eyes.

'Do you know,' he said, 'I am content for another reason too?'

She did not reply.

'I know that our friend Silla is going away from the castle. It seems things are not half so serious as we thought.'

'Father,' said Edith, rising, 'does Don Innocenzo know what you have just told me?'

'A little of it, only a little.'

She looked up for an instant at the huge mass of stone against which she was half leaning, and, standing on tip-toe, plucked a tiny flower growing out of a cleft. She placed it inside her locket, and then said to her father,—

'A souvenir of this spot and of this moment. Tell me,' she added tenderly, 'tell me that you are happy and that these thoughts came to you naturally. Tell me it again, father.'

'Well, here I am,' said a voice from the road.

Edith did not hear him, and sat down on the grass beside her father. He recognised the voice of Don Innocenzo, and exclaimed, as he turned towards him, beaming,—

'So soon?'

Don Innocenzo saw, understood, and said nothing.

'Reverend sir,' said Edith, as she and her father stepped on to the road, 'you find a different Edith.'

Don Innocenzo assumed an air of innocent surprise, which sat naturally on him.

'Is it possible?' he said, in a tone which implied that he took the words, *a different*, literally.

There were no more questions or explanations. Edith walked arm-in-arm with her father, her head almost resting on his shoulder. Don Innocenzo followed, panting, for the captain was walking at the quick march. Thus they crossed the meadows in silence. Don Innocenzo could stand it no longer; he stopped, out of breath.

'How pretty,' he said, 'that glimpse of the lake is, is it not?'

Perhaps he could hardly see it. The Steinegges stopped too.

'Poor Count Cæsar!' said Steinegge to the curate, gazing at the view. 'By the way, have you heard that Signor Silla leaves the castle this evening?'

Edith walked away, and looked at the meadows from another point of view.

Oh, amorous dalliance of flowers turned towards the all-powerful sun, of waving grasses shaken by the wind, what comfort to change with you, to live your transient life, to feel memory and heart, and the tumultuous flood of thoughts, the painful anxieties for the future fade away and die; to be but dust and sunshine, and in one's veins to feel the pulse of spring.

Going up the hill to the parsonage, Edith walked with downcast eyes in front of the curate and her father, and she saw their two shadows fall just alongside her on the path. Steinegge again spoke of the castle, and she noticed that the curate nodded, after which Steinegge changed the subject.

When they got into the house, Marta informed them

that dinner would be ready in a few minutes. Edith asked her for the keys of the church and ran away, smiling to her father.

The country seemed full of life, everything was moving and speaking in the breeze; everything was dead in the cold, empty church, except the lamp upon the high altar. A faint light spread from the high side windows over the angels and jovial saints on the roof, praying ecstatically in their woolly clouds. Edith knelt down at the first bench and thanked God, offering Him all her heart, all, all, all; and the more she repeated her devout and voluntary offering, the more the cold, closed church and even the stern light of the lamp said to her: 'No, you cannot do so, it is not yours; you hope that he loves you still and will return worthy of you, until the day when you can lean upon his manly arm and face the world and go through life with him.' But she would not have it so, it seemed to be taking back what she had freely offered, and she felt stealing over her a cold contempt for herself.

Marta came to call her in.

'Signora! oh, signora! I am just going to serve up dinner! The Lord knows already what will be good for you.'

Edith smiled.

CHAPTER VII

MALOMBRA

At two o'clock the commendatore and Silla were at work in the library. They were writing business letters and telegrams, and making out lists of people to whom cards announcing the Count's death should be sent. Vezza talked unceasingly. Sitting at the Count's table opposite to Silla, talking, writing, throwing away one sheet of paper and taking another, his flow of words only ceased when he happened to look at his pen or, muttering to himself, read over again something he had written, or when he ran his hand over his face and chin, as though to draw thence some phrase that did not come easily to him. As he talked he now and then glanced at Silla, and delicately referred to Marina's mysterious conversation with him. But Silla either replied in monosyllables or not at all. He was thinking of his interview with the poor Count in the preceding August, the evening after his arrival at the castle. He seemed to hear now the deep voice and the furious blow with his fist upon the table. The sun was now striking slantwise into the room from the windows towards the lake, filling it with a green-gold light; and the master of the house was lying in a neighbouring room, lifeless. What a change! He wrote and

wrote, sometimes also throwing away a sheet of paper to take another, but never re-reading them, though he occasionally started as he remembered a word left out or misspelt. He tried to collect his thoughts, and they kept escaping him.

'The telegrams are finished,' said Vezza. 'Let us ring for them to go. Will you be so good? Thank you. And the letters for the agents and tenants? One really ought to write to those at Oleggio. Who knows their names. I don't like to go through the books before the prefect comes from C——. What on earth is the man doing? Do you know that he plays the organ for them? If there happened to be a service, he is quite capable of not coming till this evening. And on the way he will probably fish for his supper. Do you notice a close smell in the room? No? I assure you I am longing to get to Milan. And may I ask you what your plans are?'

Silla was rather taken by surprise.

'I?' he said.

The footman came in.

'These telegrams,' said Vezza, 'are to go at once. You see,' he continued, 'I wanted to know your plans, because I might have a suggestion to make.'

'What is it?'

'In the meantime we might take a breath of fresh air.'

They went out into the garden on the terrace. The wind was blowing across the vineyard, and rushing wildly through the court, sometimes carrying the water of the fountain in a curving line on to the gravel.

'How fresh and bright everything is,' said the commendatore. 'One would hardly think that the master of the house is dead.'

'I feel he is,' replied Silla.

'I don't realise it. But listen. I am requested to find a teacher of history and Italian literature for a first-class private school at Milan. Twenty-two hours a week, two months' holidays, two thousand two hundred francs salary. Will you take it?'

Silla held out his hand and thanked him warmly.

'But,' he added, 'I have not the qualifications.'

'Oh, that is all right, I will answer for that. But what on earth are those people there doing?'

Those people were the gardener and Fanny, busily engaged in picking flowers from the beds in front of the greenhouse, behind which could be seen a glimpse of blue lake between the left wing of the castle and the green semi-circular wall of the court.

Vezza waved his hand towards Fanny, who was running across the court and passed beneath the balcony.

'What are you doing?' he said.

'My mistress's orders,' replied Fanny, mysteriously, with arched eyebrows and pouting lip. 'Don't you know?'

'Why? For the funeral?'

'Oh, as if she cared about the funeral. For the dinner-party. Why, don't you know? Did not Signor Paolo tell you that she ordered a most *recherché* dinner? Indeed, he said in the kitchen that he would do nothing without an order from you.'

'Signora Fanny!' called out the gardener.

'I am coming. And do you know where the dinner is to be? In the loggia. Just think, with this wind. And I have to stand here picking flowers, though I am so sensitive to cold.'

'Signora Fanny!' the gardener cried out once more.

'Coming—nice affair altogether. Sometimes I do nothing but cry. I don't wish to get like her, with this rough wind and this burning sun.'

'Signora Fanny!' cried the gardener for the third time, 'are you coming, or not?'

'Coming, coming! Why I am doing this is because that man does not understand arranging flowers. Don Cecchino Pedrati said the same thing; you may know him by name, for it's a well-known family.'

'Well, well, be off,' said Vezza.

Fanny went away, calling out to the gardener whether he did not see that the gentry were talking to her.

The commendatore turned to Silla.

'I must go and inquire about this dinner,' he said. 'That brute of a cook never told me anything about it.'

'It must not take place,' said Silla.

'I should think not. What did I tell you this morning? Very far from recovered! And the doctor, when is he coming?'

'He ought to be here every minute. He came this morning a few minutes before she woke up, and said that he could not get back before two. Now Giovanna is down with fever and in bed.'

'Signor Silla, said Rico from the library door, 'the Signora Donna Marina begs you to be so good as to give her your company for a moment.'

'Now for it,' thought Vezza. 'The plot thickens.'

Silla walked into the house, saying nothing.

Rico followed him upstairs and opened the door of the room with the old escritoire. Marina was standing up in the middle of the room, in the light of the open windows. 'Leave the door open,' she said to the boy, before turning to Silla. 'And now go down to the

garden and help your father and Fanny. Quick!' She stepped out into the passage and stayed there a minute listening to the boy's departing footsteps; then she turned with a piercing glance towards Silla.

She was wearing the same white dress with blue embroidery of the evening before; her hair was untidy, her face livid.

Silla made a deep bow. As he raised his head he saw her turn her back on him and walk slowly towards the window. Then she made hastily for the door and called out, 'Rico.'

But the boy was now far away and did not hear. She then stood still and looked for the second time at Silla, saying,—

'There is nobody there.'

He could not understand the long, passionate, inquiring glance; he felt that she had taken in Vezza, but he remained quite calm.

The light in her eyes suddenly died way.

'Good-evening,' she said.

Her tone was icy cold.

'Vezza has spoken to you?' she cried.

'I should have left the castle at once, Marchesina, if—'

'I know, I know.'

Silla said no more. The ebony escritoire inlaid with ivory, and the flowers scattered about the room, recalled the terrible story of the night before.

'I know,' repeated Marina, in a firm, contemptuous voice, 'but it is not enough.' And she took a step towards Silla.

'You have heard, then,' she said, 'that my feeling for you was a delusion?'

He made a sign in the affirmative. He was some dis-

tance from her, on the other side of the piano. She suddenly laid her head on the piano, then raised her face to look at him.

'And you believed it?' she said. 'And are ready to go away?'

Silla did not answer.

'Just so,' murmured Marina, half-shutting her eyes, like a cat when it is purring. 'Very natural, very simple, very opportune! Excellent!' she exclaimed, rising.

On the piano was a vase filled with roses and hyacinths. She took up a handful and flung them on the floor.

'To go away is well enough,' she said, 'but it does not suffice. Do not you feel called upon to make other sacrifices for me?'

There was a bitter note of irony in the quivering voice.

'I am at your orders, Marchesina,' replied Silla, gravely. 'Any sacrifice that you desire—'

'Thank you. Then, would you be prepared to write to Count Salvador?'

'To Count Salvador?' exclaimed Silla, in surprise. 'What should I say to him?'

'That you leave this place for ever, and will never again attempt to see me.'

'Is that all?'

'How good you are,' said Marina, *sotto voce*.

'I can afford to be, to Count Salvador,' replied Silla, coldly. 'I awaited his convenience last night, I waited an hour, and he did not appear.'

'Ah, you hate him, do you?' exclaimed Marina, her eyes flashing.

'I? No.'

She began walking up and down the room, then she suddenly stood still, saying,—

But yesterday you did hate him? Last night at eleven o'clock?'

Silla reflected a moment and replied,—

'Marchesina, mine was a delusion too!'

She laughed long and loudly, a laugh that made Silla's blood run cold.

'In that case,' she said, 'I forgive you everything, and the affair is at an end.'

'Then your ladyship desires nothing further of me?'

'Thanks,' replied Marina, smiling sweetly. 'Nothing. We shall meet again at dinner, shall we not? You will dine here? I hope you will,' she added, seeing Silla hesitate.

He knew that this dinner would not take place, but he thought it wiser not to argue with her, and he bowed, and thanked her for inviting him.

As he was leaving the room, Marina struck the old escritoire with her hand and said,—

'Destroyed, you know!'

As Silla turned round he saw the fair white hand indicating, by a slight gesture, that something had vanished; while the beautiful face nodded at him, smiling.

'Better so,' he said.

He had hardly reached the end of the passage and the top of the stairs when he heard behind him an agonised cry. Rushing back to the door of the room he had just left, he stood still to listen, holding his breath. He heard the rustle of a dress, then the key turned in the lock. Silla walked away, and went downstairs greatly troubled.

It was Marina who had uttered that cry, afterwards locking the door. She struck her forehead with her fist to quell her agitation, opened the escritoire, took out the manuscript, and making an incision in her right arm

wrote, with her own blood, underneath the last words of Cecilia:—

'C'est ceci qui a fait cela
'3 Mai 1865.
'Marquise de Malombra,
'jadis Comtesse Varrega.'

After this she pulled out one of the drawers and took out a very handsome case of pistols, made of leather, with the arms of the Malombra family, on a field azure a comet argent, on a canton sable a *fleur de lys* argent.

'You know,' she said, speaking to the weapons, 'he was ready to go. He did not see that my question was a test.'

In the library he found Vezza, who was closely scanning the rows of books with the eye of a connoisseur. Silla gave him an account of his interview with Donna Marina, and of the courteous words with which she closed it, and the cry which he heard in the passage; he added that he had not declined her invitation, having regard to the caution which her condition of mind demanded. He considered it a case for the most careful medical treatment; and he suggested telegraphing to her relations at Milan with a view to her speedy removal from the castle, which was the worst possible place for her to stay in. Vezza agreed to this, mentioning that he had postponed the preparations for dinner, and that he counted on the doctor to persuade Donna Marina of the advisability of abandoning the idea. While he was saying this the doctor appeared.

The latter listened to the account of the state of comparative calm in which the Marchioness had appeared to be on waking, and agreed to exert his influence to get her

to give up the dinner-party. He promised to return and give an account of his mission.

He was away a long time. On his return his face was dark with gloomy forebodings.

'Well?' asked Vezza.

The doctor looked towards Silla, and hesitated.

'You can speak freely,' observed Vezza.

'Well, gentlemen, I speak as a medical man, without respect of persons, and I say the situation is serious, and it depends on you that it shall not become more so.'

'Dear me!' said Vezza. 'To think that this morning she was so composed.'

'Oh! I found her calm enough. And at first I was astonished and reassured; a minute later I no longer liked that composed manner of hers. You see, after the nervous exhaustion of last night, this lady ought to be absolutely prostrated. But no, we have only the extraordinary pallor and the livid circles round the eyes. Every other symptom of weariness or depression is absent. The breathing is regular, the pulse a hundred to the minute. Here, I said to myself, the nervous excitement is still present; this calm is not natural, but is induced by force of will; and the internal struggle probably accentuates some of the nervous symptoms, such as the rapid pulse, for example. I approached the subject, telling her that she was in need of repose, that she would do well to spend one day in absolute quiet, and not leave her room, not even for dinner. Ah!'

Here the doctor waved his arms about, as though language failed him for the rest of his narrative.

'I confess that I have never seen such eyes. In half a second they looked twice their size. She assailed me with the most vehement language. Though, if I must tell the truth, she inveighed more bitterly against you

than against me, having understood, with the cunning of the monomaniac, that I must have spoken to you. It is clear that she suspected opposition. She said that people want to bully her, that she will take lessons from nobody, that she is sorry she has not invited fifty people; and so on, and so on, with a passion which seemed to choke her and made her tremble like a leaf. I endeavoured to appease her. Without the slightest effect; she only became the more angry. At length I was obliged to promise her that everything would be done as she desired, even adding that I would stay to dinner too. Believe me, gentlemen, we must act on these lines. I would advise nobody to thwart a woman who has just passed through a crisis like that of last night, and who shows such dangerous signs of a relapse.'

'And so?' inquired Vezza.

'And so I, for my part,' replied the doctor, firmly, 'should do everything she wishes, even though it may go somewhat against the grain.'

'And if we two absented ourselves—?'

'I tell you I would not do so.'

The commendatore looked inquiringly at Silla.

'For my part,' said the latter, 'I will take no part in the affair. You may tell her that, feeling indisposed, I am not inclined for dinner, and also that I am still busy with these letters. Better still, I might leave before dinner. For the rest, doctor, suppose that until to-night Donna Marina has been under the influence of a great mental shock, and that now, from one cause or another, she has thown it off, will not you admit that her agitated nerves, although regaining tone, will still vibrate for some little time? Won't you admit that, though the cause of the malady may have been removed, a relapse is not altogether improbable?'

The doctor looked at Silla for some time before replying.

'My view,' he said, 'is, that even if the cause of the malady has been removed it would by no means follow that one can now afford to irritate this lady, whose nerves, as you remark, are still greatly agitated; a lady, by the way, unhappily predisposed to hallucinations. But the question is, is she free from them now?'

'It would seem so,' replied Silla. 'Or at least there is some reason to hope so. She herself says so at least.'

'And I, pardon me,' said the doctor, 'have my doubts.'

The other two looked at him anxiously, in silence.

'I was just leaving her room,' he said; 'I was in fact at the door when she called me back. "Come here, doctor." And stepping up to me she uncovered her left forearm, saying, "Do you wish to see some terrible wounds?" And, showing me two or three pin-pricks, she adds, "Can one die of these?" Not understanding, I only looked at her. "You hardly believe," she goes on, "that a soul can pass through there? And yet I assure you," she says, "that it has begun; a thought and a secret have already gone out." This is what she said. I appeal to you, gentlemen, whether these wild words do not arouse the suspicion that there still exists that morbid state of mind of which this gentleman spoke. For the rest, we must adopt decisive measures on behalf of this lady, and that quickly. She must not remain here.'

'We must see to it,' replied Vezza. 'Are you now going to see Giovanna?'

'I am.'

'And we shall meet again at five?'

'Yes, and I am glad to think you will be here.'

'I shall leave at five,' said Silla.

The commendatore seemed anything but pleased. 'At what time,' he inquired, 'is the last train from —— to Milan?'

'At half-past nine.'

'Oh, then you need not leave till after six, and can stay and see how the dinner goes off.'

The doctor went out. The other two sat down again and went on with their writing.

The wind continued to whistle and howl, the waves raged round the castle, a wild audience waiting furiously impatient for a drama that did not begin. Round the old impassive walls there had been let loose fierce forces which desired that the curtain should rise at once, which desired to witness the suffering, if possible the death, of one of those haughty kinglets of the earth. What was one waiting for? The waves dashed against, and mocked at, the old castle; leapt upon the rock beneath the loggia, stormed along the shore, and rose in a long line one behind the other, in a wild uproar of furious clamour. The wind rushed to the right, to the left, from top to bottom, madly, furiously; passed and repassed shrieking through the loggia, hurling insults at the absent actors. The solemn cypresses, too, shook their heads, the vines rustled, the mulberry trees and the gentle olives scattered about the meadows, seized by the same frenzy, shook and waved their arms. The mountains looked sternly on. But the stage remained silent, the actors still kept in hiding.

After three o'clock, with the wind still blowing furiously, Fanny, the footman, the gardener and Rico entered the loggia, and standing under the arches towards the lake, took a glance at the sky, at the mountains, at the waves raging down below, which roared

back at them—'No, no, not you.' The four seemed to confer together. Fanny went out by the door on the right, shaking her right hand with an imprecation against heaven and earth; the others remained behind. She soon returned, probably with her mistress's orders, and the three other servants gathered round her. Then they all went out, returning with a large dark carpet, almost black, which they spread out from the three arches at the back of the loggia to three of the five in front, leaving exposed, on the right and left, two shining strips of pavement. The gardener, assisted by his son and two odd-job-men, brought from the garden two barrows full of camellias, azaleas, cinerarias, calceolarias and four large foliage plants. Two rustic flower-stands were also brought up and placed on either side of the loggia between the two doors and the balcony at the back. Fanny and the footman came in carrying three little tables, four chairs covered in crimson, and an elegant gilt *jardinière*, a gift from Signora Giulia de Bella, which Marina had received two weeks before. Lastly, Donna Marina herself, closely wrapped in her white shawl, which showed the graceful lines of her figure, entered with a slow, careless step, stopped before the central arch and began giving her orders without raising a finger, simply indicating things and places by a turn and a look.

The shadow of the woody hillside to the west of the castle spread rapidly towards the east. The wind died away, the waves ceased their uproar, as though they had noticed that Marina was on the stage.

She remained there until her orders were in a fair way of being carried out, then she withdrew, signing to Rico to follow her.

It was a luxurious and elegant scene, like a finished

painting, framed by the stern pillars and the frowning outline of the loggia. At the corners, the foliage plants rose like green sprays from the huge azaleas in flower which were grouped round their feet, sending into the air a shower of fine curving leaves, then falling back in graceful lines. To the right and left, from the two flower-stands laden with cinerarias and calceolarias, two streams of varied colour descended to the dark carpet. Six large pots of camellias standing on the back balcony formed the background of the scene. The largest of the tables, with two covers, stood near the middle arch; the others, with one cover each, were placed obliquely to the central table on either side of it, facing each other. Yellowish grey Flemish table-cloths covered all three tables down to the floor, introducing into that gay medley of colours three quiet, solemn tones, which even modified the brightness of the cut-glass and silver. Towards the centre, Donna Giulia's gilt *jardinière* displayed against the dark background of the carpet a delicate show of graceful hyacinths, stripped of all green, and lapped in the gleam of the metal, tempting the palate like an aromatic sweet, and promising voluptuous delights.

'To gentlefolks and mad people the wind is obedient,' said Fanny, who had expected every moment to see the whole arrangement upside down.

A few minutes after half-past four the commendatore and Silla came on to the loggia from the library; almost at the same time the doctor appeared from the opposite side. All stood still in astonishment at the elegance of the scene, and the rich display of colours above the sombre carpet.

'All her doing, you know,' said Vezza, who was more alarmed than surprised.

Yes, it was she who had arranged everything, and it formed a reflection of her own nature; a black heart, a glowing imagination, an intellect shaken but not overturned.

'I am going back to the library,' said Silla. 'I shall finish writing those addresses, then I am off by the secret staircase.'

'No, no, I beg of you!' exclaimed Vezza. 'If you are determined not to dine with us, at least keep within call. I feel quite feverish, I assure you. Have we done wrong, doctor, to give way to her? I have had to tell the servants it was done by your orders, to humour Donna Marina. Like a good fellow, Silla, sit in there, in the dining-room. Do me this favour.'

'Very well,' replied Silla, 'I will take my work there; but, remember, as soon as dinner is over I am off.'

The doctor was in a great state of agitation; he justified the advice he had given, offering a number of reasons, good and bad. It was evident that he suspected he had made a mistake.

'You see, I did not know everything this morning,' he said. 'I had not spoken to Giovanna.'

He motioned to the other two to come nearer.

'Do you know on what terms she was with the poor Count?'

They knew, and did not know. The conversation proceeded *sotto voce*.

Silla glanced at the clock; it was a quarter to five. He went into the library for his papers, and then crossed over into the dining-room to work.

The other two, as they stood talking, noticed the jolly-boat passing beneath the loggia, rowed by Rico.

'Whither away?' called out Vezza.

'To R——. Signora Donna Marina's orders!' he replied.

'He ought to have spoken to me before obeying them,' growled the commendatore, and then resumed what he was saying.

'Well,' he said, 'this is my idea of the telegram. Remember that the addressee is kind-hearted and most conscientious, but somewhat slow to move or to take decisive measures. So I shall write thus: 'By express desire medical attendant, with view relieve me grave responsibility, inform you nearest relation Signora di Malombra health demands speedy removal this house.'

'Put *immediate*,' said the doctor.

'I will put *immediate*.'

'And put also—'

The doctor could not finish the sentence, because Donna Marina appeared in the doorway.

She wore a dress ordered from her old Parisian dressmaker, who was well acquainted with her strange fancies; a handsome, curious dress of dark blue *moire antique* with a blue train, above which, up her right side, shot a long comet embroidered in silver. In front of the tightly-laced and elegant waist was inserted a high, narrow shield of black velvet, boldly pierced in the centre with the design of a lily, over the white skin. Marina was no longer so pale; a light, hectic glow coloured her cheeks; her eyes flashed like diamonds.

'Music,' she said, smiling and looking towards the lake; 'the music that you like, beloved lake! Isn't it true, Vezza, that music is as hypocritical as an old Jew, and always tells us what our heart desires? Isn't that the reason why it has so many friends?'

'Marchesina,' he replied, affecting a careless air, 'outside ourselves there is no music, but only wind.

The chords are within us, and resound according to the weather that there is there.'

'With you it is always fine, eh? A universal calm; and those waves say to you, how pleasant it is to laugh, what a nice place to dance in! Where is Signor Silla?'

'Ah!—' began Vezza, embarrassed.

'Not gone!' exclaimed Donna Marina, fiercely, seizing hold of him by the arm and pressing it hard.

'No, no, no; he is here,' he hastened to reply, 'but I am to offer his excuses. He is not feeling well, he could not eat any dinner; and as he has had the kindness to offer me his assistance in some urgent business, he is just now—'

She did not allow him to finish, but inquired imperiously,—

'Where is he?'

Her voice shook.

'Well,' replied the commendatore, stammering, 'I hardly know—some time ago he was in the library—'

'Go and say that we are waiting for him.'

'He is in the dining-room,' said the doctor. 'He is writing. I would beg your ladyship to accept his excuses.'

She reflected a moment, and then replied in resonant tones,—

'Your word of honour that he is in the dining-room!'

'My word of honour.'

'Very well,' she said, appeased; 'he will come later on without being sent for. For the rest, dear Vezza, with me it is cloudy, melancholy weather. Tell me, doctor, is not melancholy a disease? Does it not make the flame of life burn low? You would give me cordials if you felt that my blood was coursing too slowly; some sinister form of alcohol in disguise. But if, instead,

I take the life-giving spirits of the flowers, and fresh air, and the conversation of equable natures like our friend Vezza, and of men skilled in soothing suffering, like yourself, who is to blame me? There, gentlemen, is the hidden meaning of this dinner; and let us dine. You here, Vezza, close to me; and you, doctor, there, on my right.'

The dinner began.

The guests of Donna Marina were silent, and hardly touched the various courses. The commendatore secretly deplored that an excellent dinner, exquisitely and tastefully served, given by a young and beautiful woman, had fallen to his share at an awkward moment and under circumstances which prevented his enjoying it either physically or intellectually. He played with the only pleasant idea which presented itself to him, that of describing this scene in Milan dining-rooms with skill, his mind at rest. He looked cautiously about him, learning by heart the foliage plants and the azaleas, the falling showers of cinerarias and calceolarias, and glanced sideways at his hostess's dress, and, as far as he dared, at the white lily in the velvet shield. But the inquisitive eyes of the flowers, ranged along the flower-stands as in a theatre, told him that the drama was not yet finished.

The doctor watched Marina unceasingly, fearing a paroxysm similar to that of the preceding evening, or of the one when she first entered the Count's room. He was in readiness, and watched narrowly, without appearing to do so, her every movement. He only now grasped the importance which Marina attached to this banquet, and he reproached himself with having become a party to it. He was unable to ward off gloomy presentiments. The very spot, open alike to the courtyard

and the lake, alarmed him. So did the growing excitement of Marina, who after a spoonful of soup had eaten nothing.

'What a silence!' she said at length. 'I seem to be among the shades. Am I like Proserpine?'

'Oh!' replied the commendatore, in amazement, 'you would bring all the dead back to life.'

Suddenly he remembered the man with the distorted face who was lying beneath a sheet a few paces from the loggia, and a shiver ran through him.

'And yet,' rejoined Marina, 'my guests are as melancholy as the judges of the infernal regions. Give me some Bordeaux,' she said to the old butler, who was waiting alone, more mournful even than her guests, 'and to these gentlemen also.'

The butler obeyed. Devoted to the poor Count, whom he had served for twenty-two years, this meal was a torture to him. He poured out the wine with a trembling hand, making the neck of the bottle clink against the edge of the glass.

'I beg you to taste this wine,' said Marina. 'Just think of it, now! Do you not notice a distant flavour of Acheron?'

The commendatore raised his glass, took the bouquet of the wine, touched the glass with his lips, and said,—

'There is something unusual.'

'Let us suppose then, Commendatore Radamanthus,' said Marina, in an agitated voice, the corners of her mouth twitching convulsively, 'that for certain reasons of my own I have thought well—'

She fell back in her chair, pursing up her lips, and with her hand making a gesture as of one who contemptuously casts away some low thing.

'You see,' she said, 'this life is such a low thing!

Suppose then that I have decided to open the gate and to go out when the sun dies, in the midst of my flowers, and taking with me a few witty friends in case the journey should prove too long. Suppose that in that Bordeaux—'

Vezza started, and looked at the butler standing impassively near the door on the left.

'Oh!' exclaimed Marina, 'how quickly you believe me!'

She called for more wine and raised the glass to her lips.

'An unusual taste?' she said. 'Suppose it is pure, this Bordeaux, as an *Ave Maria!* It was a jest of Proserpine's. Drink,' she continued excitedly, 'Knights of the Wofúl Countenance. Pluck up heart and spirit!'

The doctor did not drink. He knew that a storm was coming. Vezza, on the other hand, obeyed Donna Marina's bidding and emptied his glass.

'Bravo!' said she, turning pale. 'Take inspiration for a difficult reply.'

'From Proserpine to a Sphinx, Marchesina?'

'To a Sphinx, yes, and soon perhaps to become stone, or colder still. But first let her speak and explain all.'

'Therefore—'

She had turned more and more livid. At this moment a tremor running through her whole frame stopped further utterance. The two men rose to their feet. She caught up a knife, and furiously drove its point into the table.

'Calm yourself, calm yourself,' said the doctor, taking hold of one ice-cold hand and bending over her. She had already mastered herself; she thrust away the doctor's hand and got up.

'Air!' she said.

She passed between her table and the doctor's, and rushed on to the balcony above the lake.

The doctor was upon her in a moment, to seize and restrain her.

But she had already turned round and faced Vezza with two flashing eyes.

'Well,' she exclaimed, hastening to talk and so cause her momentary weakness to be forgotten, 'do you think that a human soul can live more than once upon the earth?'

And since Vezza, amazed and alarmed, said nothing, she cried out to him,—

'Answer!'

'No, hardly, no, hardly,' he said.

'Yes, I tell you! It can!'

They held their breath. The gardener, the cook, and Fanny, on a hint from the butler, hastily ascended the stairs to listen, and to peep through the keyhole. The wind had died away; the slow waves whispered against the foot of the walls. Listen, listen!

Through the silence there resounded once more the voice of Marina.

'Sixty years ago, the father of the dead man there (she pointed with her forefinger towards the wing of the castle) imprisoned in this house, like a wolf with hydrophobia, his first wife, and did her to death by inches. This woman has returned from the tomb to avenge herself on the accursed race which has commanded here until to-night!'

She kept her eyes fixed on the door to the right, which was open because they had placed a sideboard in the adjoining room.

'Marchesina!' said the doctor, in a tone of wild rebuke. 'But, really! why do you say such things?'

At the same time he seized her left arm in his iron grasp.

'There are people outside!' cried Marina. 'Come in, come in, all of you!'

Fanny and the others fled, only to return immediately on tiptoe to peep in, keeping out of sight.

Silla came to the door of the dining-room. He could not see Marina, but he heard everything. Now she was saying,—

'Come in! He does not come because he knows the story. But he does not know all, he does not know all; I shall have to tell him the end. Returned from the tomb, this is my banquet of victory.'

Her voice suddenly died away. She flung her arms round the pillar against which she was standing, laid her forehead against it, shaking her head vehemently as though she wished to drive it in, and uttered a long, hoarse, passionate groan, fit to freeze the blood of whoever heard it.

'The nurse, the woman who came last night!' said the doctor, in a loud tone in the direction of the door; then he turned round to Marina, on whose arm he carefully kept a hold.

'Come, Marchesina,' he said gently, 'you are right, but be good and come away; don't say these things which upset you so much.'

She raised her head, and with her right hand arranged the disordered hair upon her brow, her eager glance still flashing through the doorway into the dark room beyond. On her heaving bosom the lily rose and fell; it seemed to be struggling to open out. The gardener's wife appeared in the door. Marina, with a violent wave of her free arm, signed to her to be off, and said to the doctor, speaking more by gesture than words,—

'Yes, let us be going, let us go into the dining-room.'

'Would not your own room, perhaps, be better?'

'No, no, to the dining-room. But let go my arm.'

She uttered the last words with so dignified and haughty an air that the doctor obeyed, contenting himself with following her. His one consuming idea at that moment was to get her away from the balcony.

Marina walked slowly away, keeping her right hand in the pocket of her dress. Vezza and the butler gazed stupidly after her. The doctor, who was following behind her, stopped for a moment to give an order to the nurse. Meanwhile Marina reached the door.

Fanny, the cook and the gardener had drawn on one side to allow her to pass without her seeing them. In the dining-room the venetian blinds were half closed and the curtains drawn.

Silla was standing near the dining-room door. He saw Marina coming, and for a moment hesitated. He knew not whether to step forwards or on one side, or to withdraw inside the room. She took two rapid steps towards him, said, 'Oh, *bon voyage!*' and raised her right hand. A pistol shot flashed and rang out. Silla fell. Fanny fled shrieking; the doctor sprang into the room, and calling out to the men, 'Hold her,' flung himself down by the wounded man.

Vezza, the butler, and the other woman, all calling out together, came rushing in to see who was the victim. The gardener and the cook cried out, each urging the other to lay hold of Marina, who, turning back, passed through the crowd with the smoking pistol in her hand, without anyone daring to lay a finger on her, and crossing the loggia, passed through the opposite door, locking it behind her. All this happened in less than two minutes.

The gardener and the butler, feeling ashamed of them-

selves, flung themselves against the door and broke it in by sheer weight. The passage was empty. They stood still, hesitating, expecting a shot, a bullet in the chest, perhaps.

'Forwards, you cowards!' cried the doctor, dashing between them. In the corridor he stopped to listen. Not a sound.

'Stay where you are,' he said, and hastened into the Count's bedroom.

Empty. The candles were burning peacefully. They went in; he into her bedroom, the others into the room with the old escritoire.

Empty.

The doctor ran his hands through his hair and cried out furiously,—

'Accursed cowards!'

'To the library!' said the gardener.

They rushed downstairs, the doctor going first. On reaching the passage they heard a great shouting, and made out the voice of the commendatore, who was calling out, 'The boat! the boat!' He ran out on to the loggia and leant out over the lake.

Marina, alone in her outrigger, was passing below, making for the open, steering towards the east.

On the seat, by the helm, could be seen the pistol.

'To the boat!' said the doctor.

Vezza called out behind him,—

'By the secret staircase!'

They went down the secret staircase. The doctor slipped and rolled down to the bottom; but he was quickly on his feet, in time to hear an imprecation from the gardener, who suddenly stood still on the steps.

'The boat is not there,' he said. 'She sent it off with Rico before dinner.'

'It may be back!' cried out the doctor, and tremblingly pushed open the boat-house door.

Empty. The chains of the two boats hung down above the water.

It was a knock-down blow. In the neighbourhood, as he knew well, there were no other boats.

'Gardener!' he said. 'To the village! A boat and some men!'

The gardener disappeared through the little gate in the courtyard.

'Good God! Good God!' exclaimed the doctor, raising his hands.

The others kept on calling from the loggia, 'Quick! quick!'

And now the gardener comes back running.

'Is the priest required as well?' he asked. The doctor shook his fist in his face.

'Stupid fellow! Don't you see that I have come away?'

The man did not quite grasp the situation, but went away, and the doctor ran upstairs.

A window at the top of the house was thrown open, and a feeble voice inquired,—

'What is it? What has happened?'

It was Giovanna.

Somebody replied from the courtyard,—

'What has happened is that they have killed Signor Silla.'

'Oh, holy Virgin!' said she.

The gardener was heard calling out in the distance. Other voices replied. The step of a peasant was heard bounding up the stone steps; another one followed. An inquisitive crowd assembled, as though some electric current had spread the news. The master of the house

was dead; they walked boldly indoors. Some boys, too, passed through the gate of the courtyard, slipped into the house and went upstairs. They intended to go into the dining-room, knowing that the dead man was there. The doctor, who had gone in a moment before, came out.

'Be off!' he cried in a terrible voice.

The boys ran away.

He turned to speak to someone inside the room.

'How long is the Prefect going to leave us all alone?' Then he closed the door.

Vezza and the others crowded breathlessly about him.

'Oh!' he said. 'Did I not say so before? Through the heart.' One of the dining-room windows had been thrown open. He hurried towards it, everybody following him, silent and troubled; Vezza, the servants, the two peasants. The other window was open also. The *Dart* was already far away, at the end of a slanting track traced on the calm lake. Marina was distinctly visible; they could see the occasional glint of the oars. Vezza, who was short-sighted, said,—

'She has stopped.'

She did not in fact seem to make any headway.

'No, no,' replied the others.

One of the peasants, a soldier on leave, who had jumped on to a seat to see better, said,—

'With a carbine I could bring her down.'

Fanny retired sobbing, then she turned round again to look.

'But, in Heaven's name, where is she going?' exclaimed the doctor.

Nobody answered.

A minute later the peasant standing on the seat said,—

'She is going to Val Malombra. She is in a direct line for the valley.'

Fanny again began to scream. The doctor caught hold of her arm, dragged her away and commanded her to be silent.

'Why to Val Malombra?' said he.

'There is a pathway over the mountains,' replied the other, 'which leads down to the high road.'

'One cannot get on to that path from the bank of Val Malombra,' observed the second peasant.

'Yes, one can. You only have to go on to the Well of Acquafonda; a matter of five minutes.'

'There they are!' cried the gardener's wife.

A four-oared boat issued rapidly from the bay at R—— to cut off the *Dart*.

The doctor put his hands to his mouth, shouting out,—

'Quickly!'

'Will they catch her?' asked the commendatore.

'Not on the water,' was the reply. 'In a few strokes her boat will be on shore; the others will take ten minutes.'

The *Dart* was approaching the narrow, gloomy entrance of Val Malombra. The big boat was opposite the castle. Suddenly two of the men let go their oars and ran to the end of the boat, shouting out something, one could not hear what.

'A boat!' exclaimed the doctor. 'Stop her!' he called with all his might, 'stop the outrigger!'

Then he turned to the two peasants.

'It is the Prefect. All of you run to the bottom of the garden! And shout!'

Again he shouted out, syllable by syllable,—

'Murder! Stop the outrigger!'

Another boat had indeed appeared, coming towards the castle from the east, and passing within gunshot of the *Dart*. In spite of the desperate cries from the big

boat and from the castle, this boat held on tranquilly on its own course.

'They don't hear,' said the doctor; 'shout all together in the name of Heaven!'

He made one desperate, final effort.

Vezza, the servants and the women shouted with strained, helpless voices,—

'Stop the outrigger!'

The boat held on its course.

The *Dart* disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVED AT LAST

A BLACK shadow appeared in the doorway of Don Innocenzo's study; a voice said,—

'Nothing.'

Not recognising the voice, he held up the lamp.

'Nothing?' he asked.

'Nothing,' repeated Steinegge.

Both rose hastily and approached the door.

'There were six men,' said the Mayor, with true Lombardy stolidity. 'Four national guards and two carabaniers. They went through the wood. The men from the boat would have found her if she had been there. It is easy to see where she is.'

Steinegge, by a piteous gesture, begged him to be silent. The Mayor followed the other two men into the garden, and they then whispered something in his ear.

'Ah!' he said.

He had failed to see somebody else sitting in a corner of the study. She had not stirred or spoken, but now she rose and approached the door, where the light of a tiny lamp was lost in the sombre night. 'Some say,' remarked the Mayor, moving towards the door, 'that she took to the mountains. Why should she? Where would she go to? I have no doubt at all but that she is lying, as still as a stone, in the Well of Acquafonda.'

Edith heard no more. They turned the corner, and there was talking in the kitchen. She went out into the garden and sat on the little wall. Many village gossips, friends of Marina, were talking in the kitchen.

'Idiots,' said a harsh voice, 'don't you understand that she has always been mad, worse than the other one almost? He was her lover, and they were discovered together at night in the garden. The old doctor told us that. Now he was going to desert her, and in two seconds she did the deed. One sees similar scandals in the papers, lots of them!'

'Deary me!' said another. 'How did she come by the pistol?'

'Always had them. Anyhow, since August; the gardener saw her firing at the statues.'

'The doctor,' chimed in a third, 'was afraid she would kill him, never thought it was the other man.'

'He didn't know the whole story. They say she's in Acquafonda. Hardly credible, eh? They haven't caught her. A walker like her! I've seen her tearing through the woods! Who can guess where she is? If she fell in with those gipsies, as likely as not she would join them.'

The others thought it would be better to drag Acquafonda. But the depth was too great, and the well was full of jutting bits of rock.

Meanwhile, the Mayor, the curate, and Steinegge returned, talking. They could not help seeing Edith.

'No doubt about it,' said the Mayor; 'if she was mad, he was slightly touched too. A curious thing to come here to flirt with Donna Marina, when the Count was dying and she was going to marry another man. Only last night the Prefect said she was quite right to act as she did.'

Steinegge thought it better that Edith should hear these things, having been led to hope that she was not seriously attached to Silla.

'I have been deceived too,' he said. 'He was a singularly attractive man, better in words than deeds. I don't believe he was in love with the Marchesina di Malombra or anyone else. I have known a good many of these literary men. They are all the same. They fall in love, now here, now there; with them it is a kind of nervous disease. Some time ago he comes to the castle, another day he leaves it, who knows where he would have gone to-morrow?'

'Well, well,' said Don Innocenzo, '*parce sepulto.*'

'Did you hear about the letter?' said the Mayor.

'What letter?'

'That is the interesting point. Vezza searched Silla's clothes and found a letter beginning "Dear Uncle," and then something that seemed like a will. He seemed to know he was going to die a violent death. How do you explain that?'

'He had been threatened?' suggested the curate.

'A very unpleasant business,' said the Mayor, summing up. 'To be an honest man is no small thing, eh, your reverence? Difficult to understand occurrences like these.'

'Judge no man,' he replied.

The Mayor soon took his leave, the others going with him to the gate. Steinegge then slipped his arm through Don Innocenzo's.

'Poor Edith, poor Edith,' he said.

'Do not be afraid, Edith is strong, with a strength that conquers death.'

'But she will suffer. Do not you think that she was very fond of him? Tell me honestly what you think.'

Luckily it was dark, and Steinegge could not see what Don Innocenzo really felt.

'I think not,' he said, 'I hope not. She had not known him long. I hope she will soon forget everything like a bad dream. That was a good idea of yours, to leave to-morrow. I am sorry, but you ought to go. Don't refer to the subject at Milan, and now say no more about it.'

They went towards Edith, walking slowly, in silence. They stopped on getting opposite the hall door.

'Ah,' said Steinegge, 'I thought—'

'Not here, father.'

'I think you ought to go indoors.'

She rose, silently embraced him, and went into the dining-room and sat down. Steinegge and the curate sat down too, silently watching the flicker of the lamplight. The voices in the kitchen died away. Marta's friends passed into the garden, like the slides of a magic lantern. The grasshoppers chirped and the frogs croaked in the meadows below.

'What time did you tell the coachman to call?' asked Edith.

'At 5.30, dear, for the 8 o'clock train.'

'And now what time is it?'

'Ten.'

A quarter of an hour later Marta came in to see if people were going to bed, and went out silently on tiptoe. Then she put in her head and asked whether she should close the shutters.

'No, no,' replied Edith.

'Isn't it rather damp?' said Steinegge.

'Not at this height,' was the reply.

But did Edith care if it was damp? Through the door could be seen a patch of blue sky, bright with stars.

Stars, abodes of peace, how distant from us, whose comfort and hope ye are. How keenly does the pure soul feel who gazes at you the miserable vanity of many things which seem great by daylight, and the sublime beauty of death! Never-ending path by which souls ceaselessly rise to higher forms of life, from splendour to splendour, how greatly do unhappy spirits yearn for the night to remove the blind glare which shuts out from our view your shining habitations. Then does the soul grow faint with desire, thinking of the gentle, pitiful welcome which awaits him there, at the hands of loving hearts, which know the mystery of pain and the thoughts of men, and view our faults in silence, because a high, inflexible Being so wills it.

Marta went through the kitchen, loudly shutting the doors, coughing, lighting the candles and banging them down on the table. Then Edith broke the silence.

'You must be tired, father,' she said, 'and to-morrow you have to be up early.'

Steinegge was moved at hearing the calm tone in which the sweet voice spoke.

'Yes, I think I will go to bed,' he said. 'I have a few things to say to the curate to-morrow before leaving.'

The curate called out to Marta to bring a lamp and to place the keys of the church on the dining-room table before retiring to bed.

Edith did not stir.

'Are not you coming?' said Steinegge.

She said she was not sleepy and wanted to have a few minutes with Don Innocenzo, alone. Her father mildly protested at being sent off to bed.

'But you require rest,' she said.

After a moving farewell, he took a candle and went upstairs, as though advancing sword in hand against the foe

Marta handed a candle to her master, but he dismissed her, telling her to go to bed.

As the sound of her departing footsteps died away, Edith clasped her hands and looked at the curate.

'God has heard you,' he said; 'he has accepted your sacrifice.'

She looked at him silently, with tears in her eyes.

Then in choking tones she added,—

'Nor to be able to defend him!'

After a moment's silence,—

My father, too. So unjust to him!'

'Not unjust!' Don Innocenzo endeavoured to say.

She raised a hand without speaking, then she caught hold of the back of the sofa, clutching it nervously, and, biting her lips, choked down a sob.

'Come here,' she said.

The curate, who had a choking sensation too, sat down on the sofa beside her.

'Do not let us talk of that matter,' he said. 'Let us talk about the good news your father brought. The rest has all been a bad dream, which we had better forget.'

'No,' said Edith, passionately, 'did not you tell me yesterday that I was to keep him in my heart? And now that everyone attacks him and insults him, and he cannot speak a word in his own defence, who could have said so much, am I to forget and abandon him, even in thought? Never while I live, and I trust that he knows this in the better world where he now is. He without fine feeling! Listen!'

The curate turned towards her.

'I would that you had known him as I knew him. He had finer feelings than a woman. This was his misfortune, because it prevented him from getting on

in the world or being understood by ordinary people. Thus he became self-centred. When his last support failed him he fell. I believe he was a religious man; I have heard him talk with true religious feeling. He approved of all my secret plans for my father's welfare. He came to see us every day, and I never heard a careless or reprehensible expression pass his lips. And now to hear that old Mayor make those horrible speeches!'

'I don't think he meant—' stammered Don Innocenzo.

'I heard everything. If he returned to the castle I am sure that it was at the earnest request of Donna Marina. Only too well I remember what she said to me on the way to the Horror. I am as certain as if I had seen the letter or telegram. And at that time he was neglected or despised by everyone. Who knows, who knows, Don Innocenzo, what melancholy thoughts he had, poor lad, when he found himself treated so roughly by me, for all my religious principles! He who begged for a helping hand to save him from drowning. I might well have acted otherwise, and spoken to him then as I wrote afterwards. But I thought—'

She could not go on.

'No,' replied the curate, 'you should not get these ideas into your head. How could you foresee all this? Wishing to accomplish a noble sacrifice, you took the most prudent course, so as not to encourage vain hopes, and to leave the young man entirely free.'

Edith presently raised her head.

'And not to be here to-morrow!' she said.

'Better so, believe me. You could not hide your feelings from your father; and who knows how much he would suffer to see you like this.'

'At least,' whispered Edith, 'see to it that some

kindly soul follows him to the grave. Say a prayer afterwards, and make others pray.'

Don Innocenzo promised this, but she was not yet content. There was another painful thought.

'Have they written to his friends?'

'I don't know.'

'Ah, even they did not care for him. I should like to arrange for a little memorial stone. You must help me, because nobody, least of all my father, must know anything about it.'

Don Innocenzo silently pressed her hand.

'I will send a small design from Milan,' she said. 'You can write to me *poste restante*.'

'I will see to everything,' replied the priest, 'as though for a brother.'

The lamp was going out, the darkness spread through the room.

Don Innocenzo rose.

'Now go and take some rest,' he said. But Edith suggested waiting a little longer, as she was still agitated and her father might call to her.

'Look!' she said, standing in the doorway, 'what a peaceful night.'

The sky was becoming covered with clouds. Still many stars were shining in the strips of blue.

The church clock struck eleven.

'Another hour,' said Edith, 'and then this day is ended. To-morrow, it seems to me, and ever after, the sun will rise of a different colour. For how many years?'

'Oh, very many, I hope.'

'I do not know. I am thinking of my mother.'

'Why of her?'

Edith did not reply. She took up a stick resting against the wall and traced some figures in the sand.

'What are you doing?' asked the priest.

'Nothing,' she replied, and rubbed out what she had written.

Just then her father's window was thrown open, and he called out,—

'How is this? Still up?'

'Yes, father. It is such a lovely night, and I am not sleepy.'

'It looks black on the mountains. I fear it will rain to-morrow. When we return, we must remember the Pedulli-Ripa lessons. We went away without telling them.'

'Yes, father.'

'And Signora M—— is at home to-morrow.'

'We will go, father.'

'Do you happen to have seen my stick?'

'Here it is.'

'Will you bring it up, and my cigar-case which I left in the dining-room?'

'I am coming in a minute, father.'

She entered the dining-room, making a silent gesture to Don Innocenzo. He handed her the cigar-case, and she, knowing who had given it, took it without looking at it.

The priest thought to himself,—

'What did she write?'

He put out the lamp and waited till Steinegge had closed the window and the sound of footsteps had died away; then he took a small lantern, and bending down, scanned the gravel.

A word had been traced there, but the first half of it had been rubbed out. The last four letters remained; stiff, strange letters which the curate, after long study, made out to be—

. . . MWEH

The rest was illegible.

'*Weh* means *pain* in German,' said Don Innocenzo to himself. But the "m"?'

He rubbed out the letters and walked back, lost in thought.

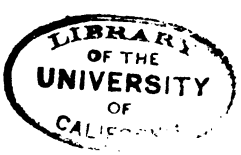
Meanwhile, in the dark shadows of the castle, the angel by Guercino prayed unceasingly for the man flung suddenly, treacherously, into eternity. His life had been brief, poor in results, darkened by much secret anguish, and, at the close, by sins already condemned by the stern judgment of his fellow-men. Yet he had fought a manly fight, falling every now and again, but rising once more, wounded, to renew the contest; he had loved feverishly, with tears, divine phantoms unknown to this world, ideals of a life sublime, which he, lonely sufferer, divined in the future; he had passed along with head erect, amidst the neglect of his fellows and the silence of his God, overshadowed by a derisive foe, badly equipped by temperament for the fight, torn by conflicting impulses, unequal to the great tasks which he dreamed of, to the small ones which pressed upon him: to make himself loved, to live! Thus each day he was urged on, by the malignity of fate and the weakness of his nature, towards his ruin.

Had one uncovered his face, it was calm. Perhaps the spirit which had been freed from sense and motion and the bonds of life was now at rest there; like one who is about to leave, after long sojourn, a house which he desired to quit, and who stands at the threshold, happy indeed, but free from rancour, even with some shadow of regret for the deserted, silent rooms. He knew that he was going to his longed-for rest; and he knew also, in that clearness of vision to which he was now attaining, that he was loved at last, in accordance with his dreams

on earth, by a strong, tender heart, which would be true to him to the end. In the light beyond the grave, the injustice of this world yielded place to a vision of order and benevolence and wisdom.

. . . . . .

But the fountains, murmuring softly to one another in the stillness of the night, were saying that Marina had passed away like Cecilia, and Count Cæsar like his ancestors before him, that new lords would come and would pass away in their turn, and that it was not worth while to trouble one's self about them. When, towards daybreak, the moon rose, and flooded the marble floor of the loggia and the rich masses of foliage plants and azaleas, which no one had taken the trouble to remove, she seemed, with her voluptuous smile, to be seeking for something which, that night, she did not find at the castle, but which the vicissitudes of human affairs have since then placed there; other eyes to dazzle with illusions, other hearts to stir with passion, in the place of those which had just been set free for ever.



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